



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

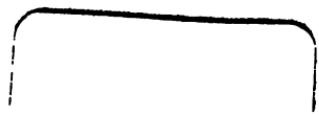
- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

# A MAN OF THE DAY

BY  
JOHN  
MILTON







600072550P

A MAN OF THE DAY.



# A MAN OF THE DAY.

BY THE AUTHORS OF

“ DAVID ARMSTRONG.”

“ Is there naught better than to enjoy ?  
No deed which done will make time break,  
Letting us pent up creatures through  
Into eternity our due ;  
No forcing earth teach heaven’s employ ?

“ No wise beginning here and now,  
Which cannot grow complete (earth’s feat),  
And heaven must finish there and then ?  
No tasting earth’s true food for men,  
Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet ! ”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON :

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,  
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1881.

(All rights reserved.)

251. i. 412.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES.

## A MAN OF THE DAY.

---

### CHAPTER I.

ALICK LISLE, when he had been brought to his friend's bedside, did not leave it, of course, until he could take Cameron with him; which, however, he was able to do soon. Good food being the only medicine the poor fellow needed, he made rapid progress as soon as the said medicine could be given with safety. His delight at seeing Alick again was only dashed by a little mingling of proud shame at having been found in such straits, and having to accept help from his old pupil. However, better Alick

than any one else ; and as he found no return of reserve between them, and that Alick had gained, at all events, a large measure of toleration through course of time ; even the last barrier of pride was broken down, and he managed to tell his story.

And a pitiful story truly, Alick found it ! The story of a man not quite a genius, who vainly hoped by mere force of merit to win recognition and fame in the great struggling crowd of literary aspirants, which somebody once very aptly likened to a swarm of potato beetles ; each pushing, struggling, and savagely attacking the others for room to live, and a share of the vegetable—too small by far to satisfy them all.

With a simplicity and honesty hardly ever met with in a man of his age, he of course fell an easy prey to the sharks who are always swimming about near the

edge of that great sea of literature, ready to snap up any neophyte who may venture tremblingly to advance a foot into the element.

Of course the big firms would have nothing to say to him. It was one matter to fill up an odd corner of their magazines with a few pretty, rubbishy, worthless verses ; but it was quite another to venture the prestige of their great names upon an unknown poet !

Poetry ! All but the very best was a drug in the market ; and the best meant nobody but Tennyson, Browning, and the fashionable æsthetic poets.

Well, yes, he might leave them of course, if he chose, but they warned him there was little hope of a favourable answer. Number two thousand and twenty-five in ledger C didn't sound promising, did it ?

Well, notwithstanding this, he had

hoped against hope ; but invariably the poems were returned with a polite note to the effect that the reader of Messrs. So-and-so did not think the poems of sufficient merit to warrant acceptance for publication.

Then as time went on he told how desperate he had become ; and just then a new scheme had been started, and a company formed for the production of works without the aid of publishers at all. It was termed "The Authors' Anti-publishers' Company," and was expected to do great things ; and so it did—for the promoters of it ! The manager and secretary pocketed a fabulous sum in the first year ; more in fact than any of their previous successful swindles had ever yielded them.

In an evil hour Cameron was attracted by a plausible and tempting advertisement, and called at the office of the new company.

The manners of the manager were of the most insinuating description; nothing could exceed his extreme courtesy and encouragement to beginners. Finding, however, that he could not induce Cameron to take any shares, he became a shade more rigid; until mention of the poems, which were begging a publisher, restored his blandness. Yes, it was quite true that poetry was a drug in the market—poor poetry, that is—but anything with the hall-mark of genius was safe to command a success! Besides, with the company's exceptional opportunities of putting things before the public, any book brought out by it was pretty certain of making a success!

So simple, gullible Cameron left his poems, and in a few days received a note, asking him to call again at the office.

Here he was received with effusion. “Our reader” was charmed with the

poems ; they were so delicate, and yet so homely ; quite the sort of touching little versicles which were all the rage just now, etc., etc. The end of it was that Donald Cameron parted with a first instalment of his small capital to the tune of sixty pounds, just to set going the first edition. This he foolishly thought would end it ; but no, there were innumerable small expenses connected with the production of the advertisements, which he had quite forgotten. Even *his* faith, however, was staggered when he was asked for a further remittance for this item, the first forty pounds being spent. Good heavens ! he had only seen it advertised four times altogether. Could forty pounds have gone so soon ? No, no, this would never do ; it would swallow up the profits of the whole edition.

Alas for the said profits—they were *nil* ! The book was noticed once in a

kindly sympathetic sort of way (perhaps the journal in question thought that as it was sure to die anyhow, it wasn't as well worth the kicking as a lively youngster would have been?), and once in a sneering scathing review, which made poor sensitive Cameron wince, and wonder how ever he had the stupidity to think there could be anything in him—and save for these, Cameron might as well have kept his money in his pocket, and his poems in foolscap.

A time of feverish hope, of sickening dread; then of despair, blank and terrible. Nothing now did he meet with from the heretofore bland manager but discourtesy and insolence.

“They were sorry, but their reader had misled them as to the merits of the poems—although they still thought that more liberal advertising might have saved the book! No, there were no profits at

all; in fact, the publication had been a decided loss to them, to say nothing of the animus a failure might cause to a newly-started company, etc."

It was of no use to expostulate, and Donald turned away, crushed by the failure of his hopes; while the manager and secretary rubbed their hands at the easy way they had got rid of their victim, after sucking him as dry as an orange. There were plenty more manuscripts in the place, plenty more pigeons to pluck!

Whether the whole of the specified edition had ever been printed or not, Donald never knew. One thing he did know, though—his money was all but exhausted, and he had not made a penny by literature yet! Well might people say it was a good stick, but no crutch. It wasn't even a stick to him, however!

After this he got poorer and poorer, and did all sorts of queer out-of-the-way

work ; wrote verses for fashionable tailors, hair-dressers, and confectioners ; verses for Christmas cards, and for tombstones ; tried to get settled occupation and failed ; until his clothes got so threadbare, and his boots so full of holes, that he could not go out in the daytime to seek it ; because, after one glance, people turned away indignant that such a disreputable-looking creature should apply for any situation of trust.

The three weeks before he broke down were like a ghastly dream, he could not remember them distinctly. Thought he had walked all over London by night ; remembered the bridges best, and the lights in the water.

“ Poor fellow,” broke in Alick, “ what a blessing you didn’t feel tempted to throw yourself in and be done with it.”

“ And did I no ? ” said Cameron, shuddering at the recollection. “ It was only

the fear o' my Maker that held me back!"

"Do you mean to say you never lost faith in *Him*, after all He let you go through?"

"Lost faith, laddie? I wouldna' do that; I darena'! Man, gin I hadna' believed that there would be a hereafter where a' things wrang here would be richted—what was to hinner me puttin' an end to my puir, blighted failure o' a life? Na, na, I never lost faith in God, it was only in *myself* I did that!"

Alick said nothing in reply to this. If religion really supplied the only support possible to a weak clinging nature like this, why should he seek to draw it away? He would not have meddled with the faith of a woman—why, then, of this poor fellow, in whom there was much of the woman's nature?

Before they left the dog-fancier's, Dick

---

remembered his first object in wishing to find Alick Lisle. But to his utter disgust and dismay, Alick refused to give him any information whatever as to Percy Scott's whereabouts. Also he tried to reason Dick out of his resolution to follow the young fellow, and make him do his duty.

Alick had seen Esther, and she was well. It was not Percy's fault that they were not married now, for Esther it was who refused to hear of such a thing.

Dick scratched his head and looked incredulous, then he went off in a temper.

Alick Lisle was humbugging him, that he felt sure of. No, no, it was too much to expect him to believe that! Refuse to marry the only man who could make ~~an~~ honest woman of her—was it likely now?

For some motive Lisle was shielding the young scoundrel. Well, well, the

more reason why he, Dick, should see things put right himself. And if he found Percy Scott intractable, why that young gentleman had better look out, that's all! And Dick clenched his fist, and looked very dogged indeed.

## CHAPTER II.

THE morning was dull and cloudy ; and the loiterers in Regent Street and the Parks drew their spring garments closer around them, and longed for their comfortable shabby winter wraps back again, under the intense discomfort of the bitter east wind.

Alick Lisle, as became a true North-country man, was hardy enough ; but he noticed that Cameron was shivering, not yet having got back his full strength, though perfectly well in other respects. The friends turned into a broad thoroughfare leading out of Oxford Street, and presently found themselves before an im-

posing-looking building, in the early Italian style. Above the huge doorway were emblazoned the words—"The *Æsthetic* Gallery."

"Let us go in out of the wind," said Alick; "I haven't had much time for pictures since I came to town!"

"I've had time enough, but no money!" responded his companion; "but ye'll no care for *this* much!"

"Why? Isn't it a good exhibition?"

"Good? Well, that's a matter o' opinion, maybe; but it's the manner not the matter I was thinkin' on! Not that I can speak from pairsonal experience," he added, cautiously, "but I can tell pretty well what it'll be, and ye need an education to understand it rightly, at least if all one hears is true."

Alick laughed, but laid down two shillings, and they passed in.

Truly, whatever the pictures might be,

---

the galleries were superb! The broad marble steps; the noble arches hung with portières of artistically faded velvet; the decorations all subdued and harmonious; the long vistas where the light fell softly, and there was nothing garish, in fact where the "Light of common day" was rigidly excluded, as unsuited to the peculiar style of art; and a dim unreal sort of illumination reigned instead.

It was all new to Alick, and amused and interested him not a little!

But the first picture he came to, gave him a momentary shock. A strange form reclined uneasily upon a very hard and uncomfortable-looking couch. The position must have been agonizing. You could see it in the face of the figure.

A huge lemon-tree grew out of the back of the couch apparently, its leaves carefully pressed and spread out *à la herbarium*, and its fruits large and plentiful.

Was the figure male or female? Alick did not feel sure, but guessed it to be the latter, and in referring to his prettily got-up catalogue, found the guess to be correct. "Lilith, the first wife of Adam."

Were couches invented in those days? thought Alick, with mingled wonder and amusement.

Lilith's robe was saffron-hued. So was her skin. The lemons inclined that way too. But the leaves of the trees were vividly, crudely, severely green. No wonder poor Lilith bore such a look of intense misery on her uncomely visage. Perhaps she had also eaten some of the unripe fruit which hung so temptingly above her.

Alick looked at the picture, and then at Cameron. "Is this the sort of thing?" he asked, gravely.

"This is the sort of thing!" answered his friend, with equal solemnity.

---

Just then a young man passed them, and stopped at a large picture close by. He was escorting some pretty girls—country cousins evidently—and pointing out the beauties of the collection with an air of proprietorship, which made Alick sure he must belong to the school which had produced it. The young fellow was tall and thin; he wore a velvet coat, and an eye-glass; and spoke with a slow drawl, which was both exasperating and amusing.

The picture they were before was evidently a famous one, for its merits were dilated on at great length.

“But I cannot make anything out of it!” objected one honest girl, with anxious regret at her own incapacity; “I have tried hard; I have, indeed, cousin Reginald, but it all seems so confused somehow, and the figures are so misty and uncertain in their outlines! Perhaps

it is the light, though ! It's such a dark day," she added, deprecatingly.

Cousin Reginald glanced at her severely through his eye-glass, then he spoke slowly and solemnly.

"No-oo, it's not the light, cousin Bessie, it's the imagination that's waanting—that's what it is ! When you come before a masterpiece laike that, you must forget your own small self-consciousness ; try as far as possible to bring your mind into accord with that of the artist. Then things begin to dawn upon you, and you gradually see what he means. But not without imagination, cousin Bessie, not without that great gift ! "

And Mr. Reginald sauntered on, oppressed by his country cousin's dense stupidity. Bessie followed in his wake meekly enough, but a smile curved the corners of her rosy lips for a moment, especially when she noticed Alick's amused attention.

“No wonder the poor girl could make nothing of it!” cried Alick, laughingly, as they stood before the “masterpiece.” Figures in pseudo-classical garb, standing very unsteadily on their feet, and outraging every principle of anatomy in their extraordinary proportions, were taking part in some wonderful procession—was it the dance of death? The background was misty, and yet flat; white lines meant for water; and the funniest little round trees ever seen out of a child’s toy box, dotted here and there, at regular intervals, made up the landscape. The faces of nymph and youth, matron and sage, were all of the same type, and the same vacant stare reigned in every eye.

Perhaps models were scarce?

No. 181, “A Dream of Beauty—Perugino Tomkins.”

“If Perugino Tomkins’ dream is ever realized, may I be far away?” muttered

Alick ; while Cameron groaned, and said contemptuously—

“ And people can be humbugged into believing they admire such stuff as that ! ”

But they were forced to confess that a few of the pictures, particularly those of one or two clever French and Belgian artists, were admirable.

There was little or no sentiment about these ; but for mere technical skill—brush power ; for clever modelling, and exquisite harmonies of colour, they were incomparable. Some of the portraits, too, impressed Alick as subtle in their grasp and delineation of character, although coarse, and without much charm in their manner of treatment and feeling.

But the affectation, the eccentric drawing, and attempted mysticism of most of the productions were simply repellent to the young fellow, whose own chief attributes were earnestness and truth.

He could not even see the undoubted poetry of the more imaginative specimens of this class of art ; they seemed to him sickly, effeminate, and false. He followed out the effect on the minds of those influenced by such a school of thinkers, and shuddered.

Then he began to look at his catalogue, and noticed that, when the æsthetic artists did not quote their own particular poets, they had rather a leaning towards an erotic writer of a very different calibre. Alick scarcely knew him by name.

“Who on earth is Anacreon Lorn ? ” he asked, when they came out of the gallery ; “they seem to have rather a weakness for him in there.”

“Hech, mon, and d’ye no ken the prophet o’ the fleshly school ? ” laughed Cameron. “Some folks think he’s the finest poet o’ all time.”

“There’s a sort of swimming rhythm

about his verses, certainly, for those who like that style of thing ; but I don't see much else to admire."

"And yet the divine spark's no' wantin'," went on Cameron, gravely, "that's the pity of it ! To think a man has it in him to reach the ideal we puir haltin', weak, honest rhymsters aim at, and yet he deliberately drags his wings through the mire until they are too soiled and gross ever to raise him again —pah ! it's no a pleasant subject, so we'll drop it by your leave. The æsthetic poets are more amusing, any way."

Alick nodded.

"And who buys all those queer pictures ?" he asked, suddenly. "Surely the public doesn't encourage that sort of art ?"

"The public ? Lord, Alick, the public can be got to believe in, ay, and *buy*, mark ye, any sort of art if it is just

cannily humbugged! A few wealthy amateurs are the chief support of the place. At first—at least, this is what I was told," put in Cameron, with characteristic Scotch caution—"they formed a clique, a kind o' mutual admiration society, in short, and agreed to force their way into publicity by puffery, if they couldna by merit. So they bought each ither's pictures, read each ither's verses, and played each ither's music. Now that they have managed to keep going so long, folks have begun to say there must surely be something in them; and the critics for the most part speak respectfully o' æstheticism. Then it is the fashion now, and that gets it noticed. So this thoroughly un-English style of art threatens to leave its mark upon an age which certainly lacks originality."

Alick did not know enough of the great world to follow up the subject, so

the two men walked silently on westward.

Cameron, who could not but chafe under his obligations to Alick, had seen an advertisement in the *Times* of that day, which he fancied promising—an advertisement by a literary person for a private secretary.

He was now on his way to see after this, and being a trifle nervous, had persuaded Alick to accompany him.

## CHAPTER III.

MRS. DALRYMPLE DOBBS, the lady whose advertisement Donald Cameron was on his way to answer, belonged to a class of fashionable women who seem an especial product of this age of the world.

Clever, unscrupulous, with a good deal of tact and a happy faculty for passing over snubbings and slights, she had managed to push and elbow her way into society ; although her origin and antecedents were of the shadiest description.

Her widowhood came in the nick of time for her interests, just when her hard and incessant work in the pursuit of fashionable people was beginning to have some result.

Old Dobbs, the retired pickle manufacturer—whose Christian name, by the way, was David, not Dalrymple—though a very respectable honourable man, was unmistakably a drag on his ambitious wife, who was twenty years his junior. But he did his duty nobly by amassing an immense fortune, and leaving it unreservedly to his widow; who could thus mourn him with a grief softened by present and prospective comfort.

Much to the surprise of the world (which in the case of wealthy widows pays a compliment to the disinterestedness of the sex by assuming them “ready to jump at any man”), Mrs. Dalrymple Dobbs did not marry again; spite of a host of eligible and non-eligible offers.

She knew when she was well off, and wanted her own way, which she was shrewd enough to see might not be attainable with a young and self-willed

spouse. She took a fine house in Belgravia, and had it decorated within and without in the approved modern copyist style.

There all times and nations were combined by the skilful but unscrupulous art of a fashionable decorator.

The hall and corridors were Pompeian ; the dining-room was Queen Anne ; the drawing-rooms were Elizabethan ; the bedrooms Gothic ; while Mrs. Dobbs' boudoir was a quaint little Japanese temple, running over with lacquer and Satsuma ; and her study was designed from the work of a great æsthetic artist, and was severely Egyptian, with the great goddess Isis and the god Osiris keeping sentry on each side the door, and little dog-headed monsters ranged round the walls.

The furnishing of this wonderful house was a labour of love ; and when it was

finished, and not another touch was left to be given, the mistress of it felt as though her occupation in life was over and done with! But to the energetic mind of a woman like this, rest even after labour is an impossibility ; and Mrs. Dobbs looked about for new worlds to conquer.

People had not "taken her up," as she would like, spite of her wealth and her lavish generosity. What could be the reason, and still more to the point, where was the remedy ?

She must go in for "Lions." Once get these to frequent her rooms, and the upper ten would follow in due course.

So began a time of marking down game, stealthy approach, careful tracking, and finally successful capture.

Scientific, artistic, musical, and literary celebrities began to be met at Mrs. Dobbs' evenings ; and people naturally

talked of the hostess, and of her successful *réunions*.

She ought to have a speciality for something or other *herself*, though, to be fully *en rapport* with the circle she gathered round her. What could it be?

She couldn't draw a straight line for her life, though she knew enough of artistic slang to talk sweetly of chiaroscuro and morbidezza, texture and feeling!

As for music, she had played her scales with as much or as little taste as she did Beethoven's sonatas when she had come to them, which by a triumph of perseverance over natural deficiency she had ultimately done. It was fortunate, however, both for her own celebrity, and the comfort of her acquaintances, that she had, at any rate, sense enough to recognize her own shortcomings.

Well, there was literature! She *could* write—letters to friends. Why not poetry

and novels? The poetry she gave up as a bad job, however, when she had vainly tried to find a rhyme for roses, and could—after setting aside noses—remember nothing but Moses; which might be Scriptural, but was scarcely suitable to a love song!

In a happy hour she became acquainted with the editor of the “London Startler,” and by dint of judicious coaxing, invitations and introductions, got him to promise that her “Marquis and Mopsa” should come out in his magazine.

But if the honour and credit of writing were appreciated and enjoyed by the talented authoress; the labours of copying, careful revising, correcting of proofs, etc., were not.

Truth to tell, she could not find time for them in her busy tuft-hunting life. “But one can always get a poor person to do the drudgery,” she said to a sympa-

thizing friend. "I do the brain work, and my secretary carries out my ideas, just as a sculptor's assistants hew out his creations from the rough blocks of marble."

Mrs. Dalrymple Dobbs' views of this sharing of labour were peculiar, which perhaps accounted for her having so often to change her secretary.

Now, however, she was desperate. Her editor had been driven to the verge of madness by her last instalment of fiction.

The dovetailing to former chapters had been anything but judicious; for after killing off the wicked Marquis by a balloon accident in one chapter, the next depicted him giving a naughty dinner at Richmond to Mesdames Ballerina and Spangliosa of the Agilité.

"Genius knows no fetters!" she said haughtily, when found fault with; but

was told that the readers of the "London Startler" would stand much in the way of disregard to the unities of time and place ; yet there were limits even to their swallowing of improbabilities.

After this she felt bound to be more careful ; hence the advertisement in the *Times*.

Alick and Donald found much to amuse them in their interview with this gifted lady. She was a brisk, good-looking little woman of thirty-five or so, with a neat figure, and eyes like black beads.

The very antipodes of the small-eyed, large and lean nymphs in Perugino Tomkins' pictures ; and yet the latest craze of the woman's was to affect the languishing looks and quaintly-coloured garb of these pictured ladies.

It made a strange contrast when her natural energy broke through the studied languor of the æsthetic school. But

what matter? The æsthetic was fashionable, and not to be fashionable was simply to be extinct to Mrs. Dalrymple Dobbs!

So she worshipped at the shrine of Maudle and Postlethwaite; bought the former's pictures, and had splendidly bound copies of the latter's poems distributed about her rooms.

“But Anacreon Lorn is my *pet* poet,” the little woman would say, with a would-be enthusiastic air; “æsthetic writers are wonderful, really wonderful, you know; but I must confess they're a little—just a little—cold for me. Now Anacreon Lorn is so sweetly sensuous, so rich in imagery—in fancy—so full of soul!”

“Not much body, certainly,” thought Cameron; who had seen the popular poet, and knew him to be a small and insignificant looking man; “but he takes precious gude care no to forget what little he has!”

However, this was the thought of an unsuccessful poet, and may be taken for what it was worth.

Donald's references and handwriting were satisfactory; and when the lady knew who Alick was, her delight was extreme. The new secularist writer. The very man she had been longing to know!

Nothing would serve but they must both come to a *soirée* she was to give that evening.

Alick would have refused, but feared it might damage Cameron's chance of securing the secretaryship; and the remuneration was good, if the work did promise to be onerous.

Besides he felt just a little curious to see more of this would-be genius.

Mrs. Dobbs asked Cameron to come to her study while she made some arrangements and explanations with respect to

his duties, and Alick promised to wait a few minutes for him.

“Have you seen Anacreon Lorn’s latest?” said the lady, gushingly; handing him a volume all gorgeous in white and gold. “The sweetest, dreamiest, most exquisitely sensuous lyrics imaginable!”

Alick opened with curiosity the little book that had shot like a meteor into the world of literature. The first thing that struck him was the number and strength of the adjectives employed. Then how often two or three words (words not generally used at all in decent society) were repeated all through.

“Oh, here’s something like a love song!” thought Alick, who looked tenderly on love songs for Nelly’s dear sake.

So he read the following “sweet and dreamy” lyric—

“ Stoop down your rich and am’rous mouth,  
With kisses yet;  
Your breath, as odours of the South,  
Is warm, Laurette !

Banded with gold and laced with pearls,  
Your breasts are set;  
The subtle touch of love unfurls  
Your hair, Laurette !

With you cold virtue and hot shame,  
We soon forget;  
Your lawless beauty like a flame  
Burns us, Laurette.

For hate and love, and love and hate,  
Do bite and fret,  
Like snakes that writhe insatiate  
In me, Laurette.”

“ Love song, forsooth ! Profanity to  
love, rather ! ” and Alick shut the book  
with a savage gesture, and pitched it to  
the other side of the table.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE only thing Mrs. Dalrymple Dobbs' æsthetic friends found fault with in her receptions, was that she would insist upon having her rooms too brilliantly lighted for their chaste and subdued taste.

“She *did* like people to see each other!” she said. “Half of them would not know who they’d met, if the dim twilight so many indulged in reigned here!”

Alick felt entirely out of his element in the queerly assorted and frivolous crowd.

Cameron was attracted by a country-

man of his own, to whom he was introduced, and who turned out to be a great African traveller. His bright and animated descriptions of nature riveted the attention of Alick's friend ; and entering into conversation, the pair grew mutually interested ; until the shy poet forgot his shyness, and the distinguished traveller talked his best, well satisfied with his single listener.

Presently the hostess tapped Alick on the arm with her fan.

“There is a lady here who wishes very much to make your acquaintance !” and Alick found himself bowing to a small, fragile, modest-looking woman ; whose quiet dress and refined manner impressed him favourably at once.

But when this Mrs. Murton commenced to talk in a soft clear voice, Alick listened with surprise to the most astonishingly “advanced” views.

“I admire your style of writing,” began the lady, slowly, “but I do hope you don’t mean to stop at the opinions you have attained now ! ”

Alick thought she was one of the sweet, old-fashioned, conventional women of his boyhood ; and that she was shocked by his rebellion against accepted doctrines. He liked her all the better for finding fault with him in this gentle fashion, instead of simply setting him down for irreclaimable, as so many good people had done. But he didn’t know very well how to answer her ; for, as he said to himself often, if he wasn’t honest he was less than nothing !

He stammered out something about opinions becoming modified by time. Mrs. Murton drew up her little head, and looked at him with a pair of very wide-open gray eyes.

“Modified ? Oh, Mr. Lisle, I sincerely

hope not! What *we* look for is that you may go on and on, nearer to the light which is slowly dawning on humanity, until that time when law exists no longer, and freedom and happiness reign supreme in the world."

"I rather doubt the possibility of that millennium!" replied Alick, with the slightest shade of bitterness in his voice.

"Ah, you will know better by-and-by!" and Mrs. Murton shook her head decidedly. "In the mean time you owe me a debt of gratitude, for it was I who reviewed your 'Justice and Truth' so favourably in the *Banner of Freedom*!"

Poor Alick did not know what to say! This was the review of all others which had hurt him most. The style in which it had been written had been poor in the extreme; making up for its defective insight into the aim of the writer, by lauding him in unmeasured and un-

meaning phrases, fulsome to a degree. It was too much to expect that he should thank any one for it !

Luckily his politeness was not put to the test ; for Mrs. Murton once set agoing could talk for hours, in the same quiet, measured voice, on her favourite theme.

“ I especially liked your chapter on the false position of the sexes in relation to each other, and the equal right of the woman to freedom of action ; and that quotation from ‘ Queen Mab,’ how happily you introduced it ! You remember—

“ ‘ Woman and man, in confidence and love,  
Equal and free, and pure, together trod  
The mountain paths of virtue, which no more  
Were stained with blood from many a pilgrim’s  
feet.’

Why should the conventional form of marriage still hold good, I wonder ? There must surely be a higher and a

nobler tie than *that* possible between woman and man!"

"But—good gracious! You don't mean to say that you fancy I advocate the abolition of marriage? It is our one safeguard, as far as I can see! You have entirely misunderstood the gist of the argument—entirely misunderstood it!" said Alick angrily; feeling disgusted and ashamed.

"No, no, I won't allow that!" persisted the prophetess of freedom. "Perhaps you are not yet quite free from the trammels of the church and law, but your feet are set in the right direction, whatever you may think now!"

After this Alick got up and left his tormentor; only to fall into the clutches of a fashionable agnostic, who asked him if he didn't think it perfectly delightful to have found out that our chief end and aim is happiness, and that there is no

tiresome hereafter? and upon his indignant denial of feeling any bliss upon the matter, served up his book in another mistaken manner to him.

“Oh, curse the book! I wish it was still unwritten. What a confounded ass I have made of myself!” said Alick inwardly; as he escaped in a very bad temper indeed.

“How you seem to be enjoying this?” said a mischievous-looking young lady, near whose quiet corner he had subsided into a seat, and who was introduced as Miss Kate Clyde.

Alick laughed, and a look into her bright merry young face partly dispelled his crossness. Here at any rate he was surely safe.

“You are not—not *advanced* in your views, I hope,” he asked, anxiously.

“What! like Mrs. Murton, and the lady you were speaking to just now?

“Goodness forbid! Between ourselves I think they are *horrid*, though, of course, it’s treason to say so here! Have you been to many of these receptions?”

“No, this is the first!”—“and the *last*,” he added to himself. “What are they for, and what are we supposed to do?”

“Some people call them tame beast shows,” replied Miss Clyde, demurely; “Mrs. Dobbs says they are intellectual *réunions*, where soul can meet with soul, and derive mutual instruction and support! As to what they are for, why you had better ask your hostess for that information—mine might be unauthentic. We are supposed to talk well and brilliantly; but we don’t! We flirt, eat ices, drink coffee, or get into corners, and talk scandal. Just as I am doing now,” ended the girl, laughingly.

“You seem to care about as much as I

do for them," said Alick, wonderingly.  
"Why do you come, if it's a fair question?"

"Because I'm only a poor artist, who cannot afford to throw away a chance of getting known! Because I'm spiteful enough to enjoy seeing people make fools of themselves, as they do so often in this sort of society! Because I am no better than any one else, I suppose, and like seeing and being seen; and, above all, being able to talk of having met So-and-so, who wouldn't know me from Eve if he or she met me to-morrow! There, surely one of these answers will satisfy you?"

"Amply," replied Alick, much amused; "you are candid, at any rate. So you are an artist. I had just begun to wonder under what species of 'tame beasts' you came. And what subjects do you paint?"

“ Well, I like landscape best ; but since I made a hit in the academy three years ago, by my ‘ Match-boys Fighting,’ the public refuses to believe I am capable of anything but street Arabs ; and so I suppose I shall have to go on painting dirty, ragged, ill-smelling boys and girls all my life ! ”

Just then Mrs. Murton passed, leaning on the arm of a popular dramatist, and Alick asked a question concerning her. His companion seemed to know every one, and immediately gave him a complete outline of the much-talked-of lady’s history. Her husband, a Conservative M.P. for a good old county seat, had borne with her opinions patiently enough for a long time ; but at last the inevitable crash came, and they separated, to their mutual satisfaction.

Since then, she had gone her own way unchecked ; lectured, written, spoken ;

and at last, in conjunction with two more congenial spirits, had started the *Banner of Freedom*, a paper which became exceedingly popular among the discontented.

Alick had failed to catch her name when she was introduced to him; and even if he had heard it, would have hesitated at first to identify such a very quiet, sedate-looking little lady with one whose name and writings were familiar enough to him, though her domestic career was not.

“The great event of the evening is coming off!” remarked the young artist, as a subdued hush of expectancy fell upon the assembly, and all eyes were directed to the door.

There stood Mrs. Dalrymple Dobbs, beaming upon the great æsthetic artist, and Anacreon Lorn, the poet. The couple passed down the room arm-in-arm,

slowly and solemnly, amid the eager and admiring glances of their respective followers.

Mr. Perugino Tomkins was a tall, thin, melancholy man, with a slight stoop, and a long cadaverous face, not unlike in expression to the nymphs he depicted on canvas ; the erotic poet, on the contrary, was small and plump, with colourless eyes, and hair of the palest flaxen.

“Isn’t ‘Maudle’ in form this evening ? ” asked Miss Clyde, in a whisper ; most interested, of course, by the one whose greatness lay in the same way as her own littleness. “*Punch* isn’t a bit too hard on him, is he now ? He must miss ‘Postlethwaite’ terribly though ! He couldn’t come to-night, and Maudle can’t say Bo ! to a goose without him. Anacreon Lorn will make a poor substitute, for he wants all the worship for himself, doesn’t he ? ”

“I don’t know, for I never saw him before,” replied Alick, following the figure with a strange feeling of fascination and repulsion.

“Perhaps you admire his poetry, though? Do you think the greatest compliment you can pay to a woman you love is to wish her dead? That’s what he does apparently! Don’t you remember that absurd ‘Lover’s Wish’ of his?”

“I never saw a book of his until this morning, and I don’t want ever to see one again,” said Alick, bluntly; “the one I looked at is indecent and loathsome, at least to my way of thinking!”

“Bravo!” cried Miss Clyde, in a low voice, and then—such is the power of fashion—she looked nervously around to see if any one had noticed their heresy.

But a follower of Perugino Tomkins was describing a “Death of Adonis” his master was painting, and the disciples

were listening with breathless interest; while the great man himself posed his long lean figure languidly against a mantelpiece; a chastened but ineffaceable melancholy stamped on his features, beautiful and impressive to behold.

In the mean time, Kate Clyde had found a copy of "Sonnets for Dark Hours," and handed it to Alick to read the poem she had spoken of.

#### THE LOVER'S WISH.

" My love so fair, I would that thou wert dead,  
The grey dust sprinkled on thy sunny head;  
That thy smooth supple flanks from sight were  
hid,  
And closed on thee the heavy coffin lid !  
  
For thou art fairer than all earth can give,  
Then wherefore, sweetest maiden, shouldst thou  
live?  
To kindle in men's hearts unchaste desire,  
And fill their souls with agonies of fire ?  
  
Would that no more thy mellow lips did smile,  
Nor thy white bosom heave with wanton wile;  
That thy slim feet no more did come and go,  
For looking on thee, I do love thee so ! "

Alick burst out laughing when he had finished this unpleasant little poem ; but Miss Clyde begged him pathetically to beware, lest any sensitive æsthetic might suspect them of ridiculing some oddity of dress or manner.

But Alick began to feel that he had had more than enough of Mrs. Dalrymple Dobbs' evening ; so, looking up Cameron, the two made their adieux to the hostess, and escaped.

## CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE Percy Scott was undergoing, as best he might, the routine and hard work of the life he had so rashly entered upon.

Like many other people who have never thought much on the subject, he fancied the life of a soldier rather an easy one than otherwise. What was he in time of peace but a sort of ornamental protection ; well-fed, fairly paid, and with not too much to do ?

It was not long, however, before the young fellow found out how erroneous these notions were ; for he learned that the efficiency of every regiment can only

be attained by a profound attention to work, and a strict observance of discipline at every cost.

Long before he got through his recruit drill he began to understand why the army is by no means as popular as it ought to be, and grew to think even desertions not entirely inexcusable.

Hard and prolonged as was often the physical labour, and close as was the application required, it was neither of these that grated most on poor Percy—indolent though he had always been—it was the absolute obedience demanded, and the enforced marks of respect to his superiors, that made the proud, foolish lad wince so often.

He had hated even his father's dictatorial tone, as the old man sent him to some menial task ; but what was that compared to this constant subordination, or servitude, as he called it to himself ?

His sergeant was a rugged-looking Scotchman, and a strict disciplinarian; and Percy's resentment against military regulations at first took the form of aversion to the man himself, and a wild wish to rebel against his authority, but he could not do it.

Sergeant McAllister had the power of a strong character over a weak one; and indeed, speaking generally, the men—however they disliked him at first—always yielded, and usually ended by becoming attached to the grim sergeant.

Neither did Percy get on particularly well with his comrades, for he could not at first forget that his social position had been superior to that of most in the ranks; and having repulsed one or two friendly overtures, fancying they were too much of familiarities, he was in future pretty often left to his own society, and dismal enough he found it sometimes.

Though many of the lad's grievances were unreasonable, and due to his own morbid sensitiveness ; there was at least one which any man would be entitled to feel, and to resent bitterly.

The contempt with which the uniform is treated is surely enough to rouse any soldier's indignation. Good enough to defend the hearths and homes of his country ; good enough to risk his life to maintain her honour ; and yet not good enough, forsooth, to sit in the same restaurant with clerks, and tradesmen, even artizans, while he wears the soldier's garb.

Surely, surely these must be degenerate days, when such things can be ?

When the uniform, instead of ennobling, is held to degrade a man ; and ever so contemptible a civilian is supposed to take precedence of one of the nation's defenders ! And when an officer never

thinks of appearing in anything but mufti, if he can by any possibility avoid it.

How would even old Homer have managed to sing of warriors honoured as little as these?

But in these ultra-civilized days, if our poets were for once to leave their songs of fair women, their morbid self-revealings, and their revelling in sensuous beauty; and sing to us of brave men, daring heroism, and the beauty of self-renunciation—would they find an audience?

And yet, alas! we have our battles still; and these despised soldiers are ready to fight them; though no poet will chronicle their conflict, and the memory of their heroism may even be forgotten!

Troubles seemed threatening old England from every quarter, during the months that succeeded Percy's enlistment.

At the Cape especially, the Boers having failed to hold their own against native tribes, the British had been obliged to interfere. It became necessary to send troops out, and almost the first regiment under command to sail was the very one Percy had entered.

It was soon talked of amongst the men, and came to Percy's ears like a clap of thunder. He had never thought of this!

Good heavens! to leave England, home, Esther—all that had formed the associations of his life, and go out to fight those beastly black fellows. His heart failed him when he thought of it.

However, he saw the other men did not take it badly. The most of them—especially the younger ones—seemed to think it would be good fun. Those who had seen service—graver, older, steadier men; with perhaps wives and families

to leave behind—looked at it more seriously.

Some of them had been at the Cape before, and shook their heads, when raw, foolhardy lads boasted of the way they would make the natives knock under.

Among these was the Scotch sergeant, McAllister.

“ Do you think we’ll have to stay long, sergeant ? ” asked Percy, rather timidly, of the stern-looking man ; who frowned and said he did not know, but he wished boys wouldn’t bother him with foolish questions, which only time could answer. Then, looking kindly enough into the lad’s white face—for Sergeant McAllister had a soft heart, spite of his stern face and ferocious eyebrows—he asked if there was anybody in particular that it would be hard to part with ; and on hearing a hesitating affirmative, told Percy that

they would probably sail from Portsmouth, and friends who wished to say good-bye would do well to come there and see them off.

Friends! Who was there that would care to come from the far north to say good-bye to such a ne'er-do-well? The young fellow's heart ached as he pondered this bitterly.

As soon as the news came to Elm-tree Farm, it caused quite a revolution in the household. Mr. Scott then for the first time realized what a serious business this enlistment of his son's was likely to turn out.

“Ordered to the Cape.” All very well for those who were not only sons, and whose fathers could not afford to keep them at home.

But as for Percy—the idea was preposterous! If the foolish, obstinate boy would only write a word, wouldn't his

silly old father go off at once and see about it?

Surely he might make this sacrifice of his mistaken pride? But no, the foolish boy never wrote that word, and so at last the father's pride had to be the one to give way.

His indignation at the lad's conduct had rather cooled down through course of time, and now it only needed a little concession to render him very soft-hearted indeed. Nevertheless, the letter in which he made the offer of buying Percy out was by no means a conciliating one. It was the best he could manage in that line; but his self-will prevented it being too kind.

Accordingly it was stiff, formal, cold; and although it insisted strongly on an assent, it did not show the amount of feeling necessary to gain the point, if indeed gained it could ever have been.

In after days Mr. Scott was haunted by the memory of that letter ; the difficulty he had first to bring himself to write it at all, then the impossibility of making it an affectionate one.

What would he not have given then to have been able to rewrite it—then, when it was all too late ?

Percy felt pleasantly excited when he received this epistle, the first he had had from his father since their quarrel—save indeed the few lines that sealed it immediately after his enlistment.

He would not have liked to leave the old country without one word of affection from the home he had never cared for until he had lost it.

Poor old father, it was good of him to write ; and more than he, Percy, had any right to expect, considering everything !

But his face changed as he read on.

No word of kindness was in it, nothing

of sorrow for the estrangement, of hope for future reconciliation. Only a stern, formal command to leave the army, and an offer of the means of doing so.

Percy's first feeling was one of intense disappointment, but this was speedily followed by indignation.

What! He was to leave his regiment just when there was a chance of active service; be branded as a coward in the eyes of his comrades—and all for what?

The whim of a cold-hearted, obstinate man; who, if he had ever shown a spark of natural affection, might have saved him, Percy, a good deal of the mad folly and wrong-headedness by which his life had been wrecked.

It was not to be thought of for a moment. The idea was simply monstrous!

At what a low estimate his father must

have rated him, before he could advance so shameful a proposition !

Well, perhaps after all there was no one but himself to blame for that.

He had been a coward, a wretched, pitiful, cringing coward ; most of all when he denied the woman he loved, and who had loved him with so fatal a devotion.

The old man was right to despise him.

The young fellow's face burned with shame as he remembered all this. Then a resolution came to him.

He would not be bought off.

No ; he would fight, if fighting came in his way ; and, God helping him, he would try to show himself no coward in the end.

He hated the idea of bloodshed ; he knew that the sight of it would go far to unman him ; but he would conquer all

that, and try at last to be worthy of Esther.

For there was at all events this that was noble in Percy Scott. He never—like so many in his position—thought slightly of the woman who had fallen through love of him. Although she had sinned, he knew her to be of a nature higher and purer than his own, and he acknowledged it freely.

The letter he wrote to his father was perfectly respectful, but it was firm in its refusal.

He put the case very plainly and forcibly, showing how incompatible with any remnant of honour would be the leaving his regiment at present. He ended by thanking the old man for his offer, and begged him not to think his son ungrateful in refusing it, and sent his love to Nelly.

Altogether it was a simple, manly

letter, and Mr. Scott could scarcely help admitting it. Nevertheless he tried to believe himself offended by it. He *would* not acknowledge his son in the right; when the lad was acting not only in opposition to his wishes, but in direct disobedience to his commands.

He had humbled himself to make the overture, and the pain of its non-acceptance was hard to bear.

“Percy had shown no regard to *his* feelings; did not care apparently about his old father, so he might just do as he liked; perhaps he would be sorry when the time came for his leaving; anyway, his father wasn’t going to write any more letters, to have them slighted in this fashion.”

Deep down in his heart was the feeling that, if he wrote at all, his love would get the better of him; and the last remnant of his pride must be given

up, and this he could not bring himself to.

Why, however, he should have insisted on Nelly's silence also, is difficult to say; perhaps a mere bit of arbitrariness, the insisting on obedience where he had still power to enforce it; more likely, a jealous grudging that another should show to Percy greater affection than he himself had done.

Crushed down and repressed, the love that was in his heart was growing strangely morbid; and more than ever before took the form of hardness, almost of cruelty, towards the son he felt almost foolishly fond of.

## CHAPTER VI.

It might be possible for Mr. Scott in his anger to let his son go without a word ; possible even for Nelly to submit to not bidding her brother good-bye ; though it cost her a terrible struggle to burn the loving letter she had written him, when her father forbid her to send it ; but Esther Grey found it impossible to reconcile herself to the thought of letting the young soldier sail without one farewell interview.

She felt it would be better in some ways for them both, if they did not see each other again before he left. It would intensify the grief of parting, and

make the pang worse to bear if they met ; but still—how could she endure him to go without one look, one word, one kiss ?

Who knows—they might never meet again ?

Though no special danger was apprehended at present, there might have to be fighting before things were settled. And yet she could scarcely even dread danger to Percy. In her eyes he looked beautiful as the Immortals, more invulnerable than Achilles ! But for herself —how could she ever live through the long dreary months, perhaps years of separation ; knowing she might have had one last meeting, and refused the chance of it ? The idea drove her wild at times.

She would risk all, and see him before he sailed. So she made her simple preparations ; got old Kitty to come and take care of her father while she was

away; then quietly told him she was going.

An outburst of rage trembled on the lips of the paralyzed man; but one look at her calm, determined face stopped it effectually.

He contented himself instead with muttering, half inaudibly, "If ye think he'll relent at the last and marry ye, ye're as wrong as ever ye were in your life, take my word for that!" But Esther, though she heard, showed no sign of doing so.

Carrying her baby in her arms, she took the first train to the south; breaking the journey by a night in London. Esther was not by any means a helpless creature now; but a quiet, composed, thoroughly capable woman; with a majestic figure, and one of the noblest heads ever set on feminine shoulders.

Sorrow and shame had done much for

her, in the way of enabling her to face the world bravely. What, indeed, could the world do to her now? She had borne the worst, and feared nothing further!

So, even in that strange, busy, seaport town—full to overflowing of military, naval, and seafaring men of all kinds—she managed capitally; and was never once insulted, although many an admiring glance was cast on her beautiful face and stately bearing.

“There’s a sight makes it worth while to come on shore,” one sailor cried to another, enthusiastically, but without a shade of disrespect; “walks like one of the fine old frigates used to sail, too!”

Perhaps the child in Esther’s arms partly accounted for her immunity from insult; for she carried him with her always; and though he was a fine and heavy boy, did not seem to feel his weight. The fact was that she was a good deal stronger

than she looked ; and had a perfectly healthy, though not robust, constitution. And, then, she had always carried him so since he was a tiny infant.

“ My darling, I did not deserve this ! ” was Percy’s ejaculation when they met at last ; but there was no concealing the joy that was in his face. If he had ever doubted that she loved him still, he doubted it no longer.

To think of her travelling from the far north just to say good-bye, and after the way he had treated her ! His cheeks flushed with shame and contrition as he first kissed the mother, and then the child.

The little one looked up in his face and smiled ; with that sweet, vacant smile of babyhood, which gladdens a mother’s heart so much.

“ One would think he knew you,” said Esther, softly ; then, with a pathetic

touch of maternal pride, “he *is* a bonny boy, isn’t he, Percy ? ”

Percy looked rather ruefully at the infant. He was a bonny boy ; even Percy, who knew so little of children, could see that. And as sweet-tempered and sunny-natured as a baby could be.

“ However can you forgive me when you look at him, and think of him as nameless ? ” burst out the young fellow, passionately. “ Oh, Esther, why didn’t you marry me before—and not come now, when it is too late, to break my heart with remorse ? ”

“ Poor Percy ! ” said Esther, soothingly. “ Maybe I’ve been wrong, but I did it for the best ! Don’t blame me, dearest ; don’t blame me now, when we have to part so soon.”

Percy pressed her impulsively to his heart.

“ No, no, my Esther, you have suffered

enough through me," he exclaimed. "God make me worthy of you before I die."

Then, putting her from him a little, and looking into her tearful eyes, he spoke again.

"Mind you are my wife now, as soon as ever I return. Nothing but death shall ever part us after that!"

Esther made no reply.

If he still thought the same, she had small right to say no any longer.

Then he told of his father's wish to buy him off, and how he could not entertain the proposition for a moment. No man could leave his regiment at the time of its being ordered into service; it was impossible. But he feared the old man had taken his refusal hardly, for he had not received a line from home in answer to his letter. Nelly, he supposed, had been forbidden to write.

"Never mind, darling, it only makes

me cling the closer to the one heart that is wholly mine," he said, fondly ; looking with intense love at poor Esther ; to whom these last quick, flitting, precious, agonizing hours seemed the only life left.

Heavens, how they did fly ! It seemed no time before the fatal morning arrived, and Esther stood among the crowd of interested spectators, bidding their loved ones a tearful good-bye.

Very few were the words spoken between these two—what words, indeed, could come near to what they felt ? One last, long, lingering kiss and steadfast look into each other's eyes, and the parting was over ; save that the baby clasped so tightly hold of Percy's forefinger, that there was some difficulty in coaxing it out of his grasp.

The blinding tears in the young soldier's eyes prevented him singling Esther's face out for long, as the great transport

steamed away from the quay, and was lost in the haze which hung about the entrance to the harbour. Then indeed did Esther feel that she was forsaken, friendless, and alone in a strange land !

She staggered to a seat near, and turned so white that one of the women standing by came up and tried to comfort her in a kindly way.

“Don’t give way, my dear, don’t ee now,” she said, gently. “It makes me feel queer even to look at you, it does, though I mind I felt just the same the first time Bill was ordered off! But, Lord, he’s been through the Abyssinian, and the Ashantee, and twice out to the Cape before, so I takes it pretty easy now. Is that your first baby, dear? And a sweet little man, too, as ever I set eyes on.”

So the kind-hearted woman kept talk-

ing on until Esther got over her faintness, and felt a trifle comforted with the silly, kindly talk ; for had not many of them been through even *battles* and come home safe again ? She thanked the soldier's wife, and went on her way back to her father.

She knew she had grown indispensable to him, and had small fear of her reception.

## CHAPTER VII.

SPRING was far advanced before Alick Lisle went back to Fordham.

He shrank a little from going—spite of all his love to Nelly, and the longing he felt to see her again. Strange how their engagement seemed to fail in drawing their hearts closer together.

Yes; but he knew too well the cause of it.

Knew that he had been insincere in his promise to Mr. Scott; and that his scepticism—to call it by no stronger name—was as great as ever.

True, he had since then shunned theological subjects for his pen; had even

tried to shun them in his thoughts, but in this failed signally. Above all, he had certainly not "gone to church respectably on Sundays."

All the same, he must put off his visit no longer, or the dear little girl would think he had ceased to care for her.

Already her innocent, loving letters showed traces of wounded feeling and tremulous fears. He must not cause her any pain; dear, tender little heart!

In such an unsettled, remorseful frame of mind, then, did Alick go back to his sweetheart.

By dint of being silent often when he might have spoken; or by, when possible, changing the subject, Alick escaped any awkward questions; and escaped also any direct act of dishonesty.

But, alas, his visit to Fordham was less enjoyable than it ought to have been to a young fellow constantly in the com-

pany of the woman he loves, and who has promised to marry him !

Youth, and love, and pleasant spring-time ; and yet Alick could not forget himself and his unhappiness.

Could not give himself up to the spell of the moment, and enjoy the sweet present as a true lover ought to do.

“ You will go to church with me, Alick dearest ? ” said Nelly Scott ; slipping her hand through the arm of her lover, and looking appealingly into his face.

He had told her he would try to be like other people ; and so, perhaps, he had ; but some doubts lingered in the girl’s mind still. There was something wrong, some alloy in the new happiness which had come to her, though as yet she could not define it.

But why should Alick always be so silent when anything relating to religion was mentioned ; and why, if he really

began to believe, should he always look so unhappy? Why, above all, had he scarcely a word to say now when they were alone together?

Somehow the girl was not so contented as she had fancied she would be. There seemed nothing lacking she could think of, and yet——

Perhaps she wasn't clever enough for Alick? That would make it difficult for him to talk to her of course!

But, oh, how she wished she knew the thoughts of his heart; the thoughts which brought that look of pain, almost of despair, into his eyes!

The young fellow looking down at her felt it impossible to resist the sweet imploring look, so he assented.

What a piece of hypocrisy it was for him to form part of a congregation professedly met for worship; and of all things on earth he hated hypocrisy the most!

And yet what did it matter after all ?  
His whole life was a lie. A little more or  
less deceit couldn't make him much worse !

It would be pleasant enough to walk  
through the fields with Nelly, although  
he had not thought of that when he  
strolled up to the farm ; and it would be  
sweet, too, to sit and watch her in  
church. He would not be expected to  
talk there, you see. For though he  
would not acknowledge it to himself, and  
though his love was, perhaps, greater  
than ever, he had positively grown to  
shrink from being left alone with his  
betrothed. He dreaded the silences  
which were sure to fall upon him as he  
listened to her innocent talk, her pretty  
conventional ideas of truth and virtue.

It was a glorious sunshiny morning ;  
and spite of his discontent with the old  
world and the laws which govern it, and  
his still deeper discontent with himself,

Alick was not altogether insensible to its influence.

As for Nelly, she was blithe and bright as the morning itself. She had won her lover to join her in what she deemed the sure road heavenwards, and now nothing seemed lacking.

She had a pretty fancy that the earth was sweeter, lovelier, and nature more hushed and peaceful on Sundays, than on any other day in the week. She thought birds and flowers alike sang praise, and offered worship to Him who made them. She thought, too, that this calm and beauty might be a far-off echo of that first sacred time, when God Himself had rested from His work and pronounced it good.

Full of her own childlike happy thoughts, the girl was for once not oppressed by her companion's unresponsiveness. Insensibly, too, he was soothed by the quiet, unbroken even by the crack of

a carter's whip or herd-boy's whistle; and was gladdened by the beauty of the newly springing sward, with its every blade of grass gleaming with dew; and the hedgerows brightened here and there by a cluster of primroses, cowslips, or delicate cuckoo-flowers.

Nelly blushed a little on entering the church with her lover. To the simple country people this was held as a decided token that the young folks were engaged, and still more so as Mr. Scott had long preceded them, and was in his pew when they entered.

But when the service commenced, Nelly's blushes faded, and the brown eyes were buried at once in the little Prayer Book.

Alick smiled at her devoutness, but would not have had it altered nevertheless.

“Women ought to be religious,” he

thought, with amusing inconsistency, and with all a young man's belief in the inherent difference between masculine and feminine characteristics. And, strange to say, he liked to think of her praying for him, though he did hold all prayer to be foolish and futile.

He did not hear much of the service, for his fancy was busy with a scene which he hoped the old church would witness some day. For he supposed Nelly would want to be married at church, and how could he get her to understand what a grim farce the ceremony there would be to him?

He started impatiently at the stinging thought. A hypocrite even on his wedding-day. It was detestable, monstrous!

Now that this thought had once entered, away fled ever all the pleasantness of being beside the girl he loved. "The little rift within the lute" was

growing wider day by day, and, alas ! he had no power now to make the music sound sweetly as before. When new to love the young man had managed to silence the doubts that troubled him.

“ As time went on, he would tell Nelly how he really felt about religion ; tell her just enough to ease his conscience, not to alarm her. For no man worth calling a man would trouble a woman’s innocent childlike soul with all the grave doubts which entered his stronger intellect, any more than he would sully her purity with the bitter knowledge his more intimate acquaintance with the world forced on him ! ”

But that stage had not lasted long. He recognized, at first unconsciously, that love can only live and grow robust in an atmosphere of full sympathy.

He had grown to feel that heart must speak to heart, soul reveal itself to soul,

before the love between man and woman can satisfy the higher ideal of either. His hope, therefore, that Nelly and he could make each other happy—while he must keep his deepest thoughts unspoken, and while what was noblest in them both could ask no sympathy from the other—was a delusion.

He turned the leaves of the Prayer Book in his hand, glanced at the marriage service, but passed it over hastily. It was too dreadful to think of the lie he would have to act, and that at the very moment of the attainment of the wish of his heart! Then he began to read the Articles, and even tried to believe some of them, but only succeeded in wondering how any one ever did manage that. In the middle of this he was roused by the damnable clause of the Athanasian Creed.

At this he would fain have got up and walked out of the church; but then, what

excuse could he make to Nelly for such seeming indecorous behaviour ?

He sat it out, and the sermon which followed. But directly this was over he made for the door, not waiting for his sweetheart. Forgetting her for the moment, he strode on in a truly savage temper. He was angry with himself for his folly in coming, angry with poor Nelly for having coaxed him to do so !

Then he pulled himself up, and waited for her, but his brow was black as thunder.

“ It'll be a while before you get me to a church again, I fancy,” he said, fiercely, casting an indignant look at the trembling girl !

Poor loving Nelly ! She bit her lip to keep down a sob.

Had he forgotten how soon they meant to go to that church and be made one flesh ?

Alick did not notice her pain. His own was so great that it brutalized him for the time being.

Nelly had fondly fancied that the associations of his boyhood, and the influence of the music and soothing ceremonial of the church, so dear to her, would have done much to re-establish the old faith in his heart—and, alas! the only result of her influence had been to make him more keenly alive to his own utter unbelief.

Once more he *knew* himself an atheist; knew that the impression made upon him at the time of the death of Nelly's mother had worn off, and he now looked back on that night when the old creed had been so tempting, as one on which he had been carried away by sentimental feeling. What had it been but the mere result of over-taxed nerves, and repulsion of disgust at the lower adherents of his own school?

“ You talk of worshipping a God of love, you Christians, and here you are, in the nineteenth century, eager as ever in damning the bigger part of the world, and singing the doxology over it as gleefully as if you were worshippers of Moloch or Juggernaut ! ”

Alick broke the silence thus abruptly, angrily ; as though poor Nelly were the very embodiment of the views he hated so.

Making a personal quarrel of it to all intents and purposes, she thought. But then, after all, the personal feeling in the matter was a small thing.

What struck her as really dreadful was the way he separated himself from any participation in Christianity.

The young country girl was all unused to the daring tone of the day, and was simply and completely shocked.

To question anything in the Prayer Book seemed as bad as to question the

Bible itself! She could find no reply to make.

“They are a set of humbugs, those parsons,” went on Alick, bitterly. “I wonder how many either believe or take the trouble to disbelieve what they cram down other people’s throats ?”

Alick Lisle apparently quite forgot how much of a humbug he was himself at this time. At all events such humbug was over. Let things go as they might, he would at least be honest now!

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

ALICK bade Nelly a hasty good-bye at the stile leading across the fields home, and she saw no more of him that Sunday, which had begun so happily and peacefully for her. Poor girl, it was very hard to bear, coming just when she had hoped so much from his complaisance.

The tears kept creeping down her rosy cheeks as she went sadly on alone. Oh, how could he—he, Alick, that she had loved so dearly—wound her thus deeply? She was shocked, terrified, indignant; but most of all she was intensely sorrowful and despairing. Were all her prayers to be in vain, then?

Alick, on his part, did not spend a very

happy day, that is certain. He walked miles and miles, trying vainly to calm himself, and regain once more his self-possession. Things had been going all wrong for some time, but now they had reached a climax. After such a decided step, after throwing aside all the trammels of decorous consideration for Nelly's feelings in the way he had done, there was no going back possible. Nelly would not believe him again in a hurry, let him lie as consistently as he might; and at this thought he drew a long deep breath. After all, was there not a relief in the fact that he had now definitely placed himself beyond the possibility of temptation? Once more he would dare to think for himself; once more would dare to express his opinions without the fetters which—however pleasant and silken they might be—were still distinctly fetters.

He would have believed had it been possible; he himself only knew how he longed to do so! Ay, but belief would not come that way! Well for mankind that conviction never really comes for mere expediency's sake. And then a pang shot through him as his sweetheart's tearful face rose before his fancy. What a brute he had been to her! Because he felt himself a humbug, was that any reason for speaking as if she were to blame for all the inconsistencies and stupidities of church doctrine? He might have commanded himself better surely? Poor little darling, it was not because he did not love her anyway!

Pale and haggard-looking he came into the parlour at the farm next day, where Nelly sat alone sewing. She scarcely looked up at her lover's entrance, but he saw at once it was because her eyelids were all swollen and red. His heart

melted within him at this, and an impulse prompted him to stoop and kiss the poor eyes that had wept for his transgression. But no, this would not do; it would be very far from the way to keep the resolution he had made, so he drew himself up and refrained.

“Nelly,” he said, softly, “I have come to beg your pardon for the way I behaved yesterday! I cannot tell you how ashamed I feel that I should have lost my temper.”

Nelly gave a little cry of joy, and glanced brightly up at him, forgetting her swollen eyes.

“Then you didn’t—didn’t mean what you said?” she asked, tremulously. “Oh, I am so glad, so glad!”

Alick was silent. And the girl’s face began to fall again, and her lip to tremble as she watched him.

Surely this was not the lover she knew

so well, this man with the stern face, and the sad ring in his voice ?

“ Oh, Alick, Alick, don’t look like that,” she cried. “ You frighten me so, I can’t tell what to think ! Tell me you didn’t mean it yesterday, Alick, dearest ? ”

And creeping closer to him, she tried to lean her head against his breast. But he shuddered at the touch, and drew back. Then with a groan he threw himself at her feet and looked piteously up into her face.

“ I’ve been a liar, and a coward, Nelly,” he said, hoarsely, “ and I don’t deserve ever to come near you again.”

“ Alick, don’t, you hurt me ! Tell me what it is, quick ! ” gasped the girl ; then with a sudden tenderness, laying her hand on his head, she went on rapidly, “ but no, Alick, tell me nothing more. I do not want to hear it ! I said I would

trust you all through, and I will—I will—there!"

"Would I had been more worthy of such trust," exclaimed the young fellow, bowing his head on his hands. Thus he knelt for a few minutes; then he looked up again.

"Oh, my darling, my darling, I have lied, and been a hypocrite, that I might call you mine! I did it through love, because I felt as though I could not live without you. Yes, I snatched at happiness, and shut my eyes to the sin—just as though happiness could ever come from wrong-doing! But it is over now," went on the lover, firmly. "Nelly, you are too good and pure to be won any way but honestly."

And then to the girl's dismay he began to tell her how he really felt on the subjects she had faith in; how he had tried to shut his eyes and keep his reason

---

hoodwinked, and accept unquestioningly all that had been taught him ; and how he had first begun to doubt—doubt in agony and despair unutterable—and how there seemed to him now no good left for humanity save in truth and reason and morality ; out of which, perhaps, a higher and purer creed might be evolved in course of time ; and how meanwhile all a man could do was to seek knowledge and justice at any price, and live honestly and purely.

And then how he had been tempted by his great love for her to deny all this, and how easily he had fallen. How he had believed in himself and been humbled in the dust.

All this poor, simple, loving Nelly heard, and it was as if the earth had gaped below her feet. Her face took a strange puzzled expression, and her eyes sought Alick's in wonder. “ I don't

understand, Alick. I am very stupid, I know ; but I cannot understand a bit ! You say you don't believe, and that it pains you ; and yet you hold up your head now, and look me in the face, and there is a light in your eyes I haven't seen there for long ? ”

“ Because I am a man again, Nelly ! Because I have dared to be honest and tell the truth at last, even though I lose you by it ! That's why I can hold up my head again, and look you in the face.”

“ But oh, Alick, it's so dreadful ! What is there in life if you leave out of it all hope of a hereafter, where wrongs will be righted and crooked things made straight ? ”

“ Not much, indeed,” returned the young man, gloomily ; “ but Nelly, tell me you don't hate and despise me for confessing the truth ? ”

“ Ah, no, Alick, how could I do that,

if I tried ever so ? ” said the girl, simply ; “ but oh, I wish—how I do wish you could believe again ! You must be so very miserable, I know.”

“ Nelly, don’t think I would not believe if I could ? Pray for me still, darling ; and if there is any God to pray to, surely such prayers as yours ought to be answered ? I want to believe, only my reason won’t let me ! ”

“ Poor Alick,” murmured Nelly, sadly. “ I am only a foolish girl, not clever a bit, or perhaps I might have done you some good. As it is — ” The girl sighed, and did not finish her sentence.

“ As it is, we must part, you mean ? Don’t be afraid to say it to me, Nelly ; I’ve said it often enough to myself during the last twenty-four hours ! ”

“ I didn’t mean that, dear,” Nelly faintly answered ; then all in a moment the hopelessness of the case came before

her, and she burst out crying. "Oh, Alick, I cannot part with you now! I have grown to love you so, and there is no one else who cares for me much! Don't leave me, Alick—don't leave me?"

There was a heartbroken tone in the fresh young voice which almost unmanned Alick. He clasped her close, and stroked her hair, and murmured endearing words in her ear.

But the girl noticed that he never responded to her words, he never promised not to leave her.

Then when her tears subsided, he put her from him, and stood with his arms folded, looking down at her, his eyes full of a sad yet firm resolve.

"I deceived your father, and I deceived you, Nelly! I am not fit to be your husband, darling. No, no, we must indeed part, unless the future brings me the faith you pray and I long for! I

dare not, Nelly, I dare not ; I love you too much to risk your happiness ! ”

“ And shall I ever be happy wanting you ? ” wailed Nelly, stretching out appealing hands towards him ; and then sinking back into her chair faint and sick at the parting she now knew to be all but inevitable.

Alick, on his part, felt as though his very heart was being torn out of his bosom. And yet he knew he was right ; and in his newly regained manhood and honour kept a firm hold on his passions, cost him what it might.

He paced the room in a silence unbroken, save now and then by a sob from Nelly, or a quick impatient sigh from himself.

“ Nelly, darling, kiss me once, and let me go ! ” he broke out at last in bitter pain. “ I cannot bear to see you suffer, and yet I know—I know it is for the

best! Oh, darling, forgive me for the pain, and kiss me once before I go."

And Nelly raised her tearful face to his, and kissed him as he asked; and then, seeing the agony in his eyes, tried, woman-like, to comfort him by a faint and woe-begone smile; meant to show that she was not so very sorrowful after all. Needless to say, this failed utterly; only Nelly was comforted a little by the mere act of trying to comfort.

Mr. Scott could not understand why Alick Lisle had gone off to London again in such a hurry, and was much inclined to feel affronted; until his daughter, in answer to his questions, said quietly that their opinions had differed a little, and they had thought it better to part for a time.

The farmer was far from satisfied, but nothing more was to be got out of Nelly; so setting it down as a mere lovers' tiff,

sure to right itself if left alone, the old man waited patiently enough for time to smooth things over.

For himself, he had had enough of love affairs, and wouldn't meddle in them again if he could help it ! And, after all, he was not sorry to keep his bonny, sweet-tempered Nelly a little longer with him.

## CHAPTER IX.

PERCY had not many disagreeables to endure on his voyage out. The weather kept fine; and after he got his sea-legs the young fellow would rather have enjoyed it than otherwise, had it not been for the remembrance of all he was leaving in England.

As for the danger he was going to face, though not a brave man, he thought little of that. He was accustomed to hear it lightly spoken of; and surely those black fellows would never have the hardihood to make any determined resistance when England had stepped into the field with the resolve to settle things properly?

Now that Percy had made up his mind to try and do his best in the life he had chosen so rashly, he began to be somewhat of a favourite among his comrades ; instead of being shunned as heretofore as a sulky, morose, ill-conditioned cub, who thought himself above them all.

Naturally clever and quick-witted, he was ready to take part in every bit of fun, and all the amusements the men got up in the evenings. He could sing very fairly, act with great spirit, and recite any amount of poetry, having the gift of memory in a remarkable degree. In fact, he was very good company, when he chose so to be.

They were a good-natured lot of fellows, and the time passed quickly until they arrived at Durban.

Then after all the fun and excitement of landing was over, came the feeling of being in a strange country indeed. The

loungers watching them with interest were a motley assemblage, Kaffirs, Englishmen, friendly Zulus, and the fine-looking native police to keep order.

The camp-life, with its unfamiliar routine and inconveniences, was taken on the whole with unfailing good humour. How every little foolish joke was chuckled over, and every bit of luck made the most of; and even the hardships and mistakes passed over with a light-heartedness which brought out the best feelings both of officers and men.

Then came the commencement of the campaign, and they began to feel that it was not to be mere play after all.

The months ran on in this new and strange life; and soon after the new year some few companies of the regiment were ordered to advance into the interior, and began their long and tedious march. Long and tedious, because of the slow

progress they were able to make, because of the train of waggons drawn by oxen, which could not advance more than a few miles a day. The roads were both steep and rugged, for this part of the colony is hilly in the extreme.

Percy, on his part, was never tired of looking around him. It was all so unlike anything he had ever seen before ; and he did enjoy change so much.

The long coarse grass ; the thick, all but impenetrable blue-green of the bush ; the narrow gorges, hemmed in by steep, rocky hills ; the enormous teams of oxen yoked to the waggons, and the driver with his long whip, all amused and interested him.

The men advanced with great caution, for the enemy was known to be in the neighbourhood. Once, however, they stopped, and the first blood was drawn,

when they met and were attacked by a party of the enemy, who had been lying in ambush for them.

It was not a severe struggle. The Zulus being in insufficient force to prove dangerous were soon routed and put to flight; leaving behind them a goodly number of horses and cattle.

Then our men following up, attacked their kraal; which lay at the foot of a precipice, a few miles higher up the valley.

This after a tougher fight they burnt, and marched on, flushed with victory.

Soon after this the journey came to an end, and they reached their destination without further fighting.

Then began camp life again; and there was time to think things over, and appreciate the magnitude of the task that they had undertaken, and the dangers that lay before them; now that a little

experience had given them a new basis from which to form their calculations.

The wonderful bravery, and still more wonderful discipline of the enemy, made the warfare unlike that usually fought with the savage tribes in South Africa ; as these for the most part skulk about in the bush, taking advantage of unguarded moments ; instead of boldly attacking solid formations of our men, after the manner of the valiant Zulus.

Not that the latter are by any means innocent of strategic movements ; they know how to break the ranks of the enemy by feigning defeat, and then doubling back on him. Forming quickly into a semicircle, they then attack the opposing party on both flanks, as well as from the rear ; and so have their opponents completely at their mercy.

The struggle just beginning was a tough one ; for though their boldness of

attack laid the Zulus open to terrible slaughter, owing to the superiority of our weapons ; their dexterous use of the few they possessed, and their fierce ardour, made them foes to be dreaded.

Although Percy had several times been out of the camp with reconnoitring parties, and had been through a few skirmishes ; he never got over the sickening terror with which the first sight of the Zulus inspired him.

The rush with which they advanced, as though eager for the attack ; the noise of their rattling spears accompanying the terrible warcry—that rises fitfully into shrieks of defiance, and sinks again into a low sullen howl, like that of wild beasts greedy of prey—was terrible even in the distance ; but when near enough for the eye to take in the details of the advancing column, the effect on an imaginative nature was well-nigh overpowering.

Their splendidly muscular limbs—naked, save for the long-haired skins which encircled the neck and waist like the mane of a lion ; their wildly fantastic head-gear ; above all their dusky, devilish faces lit up by the strangely white eyeballs ; and the awful fury expressed by their invariably opened mouths, made up a picture that haunted Percy's dreams, even when utterly exhausted by the hardships of the day.

Percy was astounded at the coolness displayed by young raw lads who had seen no service ; but who, at the first word of command, faced their grim enemies with true British pluck.

The magnetism of numbers and power of sympathy carried him on for the first few moments in spite of his want of nerve ; after that not a man amongst them fought with greater zest than the slim young fellow, whose very conscious-

ness of natural cowardice made him do deeds of individual daring, that now and again brought him words of kindly admonition from his commanding officers.

Percy found one great solace during these times of action ; and that was, that thought was driven away ; and memories and remorse ceased to haunt him. It was when sitting by the camp fire at night, when his comrades were smoking and talking of those they had left behind them, that the young fellow had leisure to think of the two lives he had marred. For at last he recognized (what every one but himself knew long before) that his father loved him more than anything else in the world ; and that he had bowed the old man's grey head with sorrow, and shamed him to the heart.

Esther he might possibly partly atone to if he lived, though even of that he felt doubtful sometimes ; but would

his father ever feel the same to him again?

And then there was another! His boy. That boy who was nameless through his sin, and yet for whom he felt a strange half-proud, half-shamed feeling, which he could not understand.

He saw in fancy Esther's stately figure, as she stood holding the little fellow in her arms, who crowed and laughed happily in the face of the father, leaving him perhaps for ever.

Percy could still feel the soft yet decided clasp of the baby as it seized upon his finger, and would scarcely let it go again; it thrilled through him yet at times.

Poor little chap! Would he ever see it again, he wondered? The child had his own dark eyes—God prove it might grow into a better man!

The young fellow sat thus thinking,

thinking, long after the others had dropped off, leaving him alone. His pipe had gone out, and he leaned his head on his hand and gazed disconsolately into the fire.

Even the clear starlit sky above him was not like that at home ; and every sound that reached his ears, borne on the wind, was different from those that broke the peaceful stillness of the night at Fordham. Long drawn distant howls were to be heard at intervals ; short barking cries of jackals, and wails of what the colonists call tigers—which, however, are in reality true leopards.

Sergeant McAllister, who was having a prowl around before turning in, came upon him sitting thus.

“ You’re wakeful, laddie,” he said, kindly, laying his hand on Percy’s shoulder ; “ thinkin’ o’ the dear ones at home, I reckon ? ”

Percy nodded ; he could scarcely speak, his heart was so full.

“ Weel, weel, it’s guid to think o’ them whiles, and now mair than ever, wi’ danger all about us.”

“ Danger ? ” asked Percy, in surprise ; “ it’s all very quiet now, surely ? Some of the fellows think they’ve taken fright, and that we’ll have little more trouble.”

The sergeant shook his head.

“ I’m not so sure o’ that,” he said, cautiously ; “ they’re owre quiet now not to be up to mischief.”

Percy glanced nervously around. His courage was not of the soldier’s kind, nor would it ever be ; the kind that is always available, always watchful.

“ Do you think they mean a surprise ? ” he asked, anxiously. “ Oh, do you think we ought to be more prepared ? ”

“ We are as careful as it is possible for men to be ; but we are in God’s hands,

remember that, my lad," added the sergeant, solemnly.

"God's hands," repeated the young soldier, tremulously; "but some of us don't deserve much of Him?"

"None of us *deserve* much for the matter o' that; but that disna' prevent his carin' for us!"

Then the good sergeant sat down beside Percy, and began to talk in a kindly, sensible way, not setting him down for an utter coward, because the lad confessed to an almost womanish dread and horror of bloodshed; and declared it was all he could do at times to prevent himself ignominiously taking flight from the ranks.

The sergeant cheered instead of this, and encouraged him, saying that some of the bravest soldiers he had ever known had felt like this; but that, when they had once conquered the feeling, it did not

prevent them fighting; ay, and even dying like heroes if death came to them.

Anybody endowed by nature with a robust physique could show mere brute courage without a spark of nobility; but the conquering of oneself, the facing of danger when its full terrors were recognized, was not that a finer thing by far? And there was only one way a man could do this, only one way he knew of, and that was by a strength given from above.

It was long since Percy had been spoken to so considerately, and yet so hopefully; and before he knew very well what he was doing the lad found himself telling all his foolish, sad, reckless story to this newly-won friend; and begging him not to despise him too much for it.

McAllister's face grew grave and sorrowful as this record of sin and folly was poured into his ears; but Percy was so

evidently in earnest in his contrition, that the older man could not find in his heart to bear too heavily on him.

“Eh, lad ; but ye’ve gae far fra’ the richt path,” he said, solemnly ; “but I’m no sayin’ that the Almighty ’ll be so hard on ye as we poor frail mortals are on one anither. One thing I maun know though,” and here the sergeant looked stern, as he darted a keen glance at Percy from under his bushy eyebrows, “is it yer honest intention to do the richt by that puir lass ?”

“Of course ! You don’t suppose for a moment I would let her live with a slur on her name if I could help it ?” replied Percy, hastily, flushing with shame at the thought. “I would have married her at once—only—only she wouldn’t have me ;” and here a lump seemed to rise in his throat and choke him.

The sergeant nodded his head approvingly, but said nothing.

After a moment or two Percy spoke again. "She's my wife in the sight of God, remember that, please, whatever any one may say," he went on, boldly; then relapsed into silence.

Sergeant McAllister stretched out his arm, and the two grasped each other's hands warmly.

"I like that, Scott," said the older man, with emphasis. "And if there's anything I can do for ye, ye're heartily welcome to ask for it."

Percy looked dreamily into the night.

"Who knows—something might happen to me! I never felt as though I should have a long life! If there should, you might let her know how I thought of her; let her know I've done what I could to make myself worthy, though I'm afraid that's been little! I wish you could see her once, sergeant, and then you'd understand! She's not like—like any woman

I ever saw. I never dare go near her again, if I failed in my duty—that's what keeps me up more than all! Oh, my darling, my darling, if I might only look into your clear eyes a minute, I think I could go through anything," he said, softly, a mist creeping over his own eyes at the sweet vision conjured up by memory.

The sergeant was deeply troubled and interested by the young fellow's confidences; and, of course, promised to fulfil his request should it ever be needful, although he pooh-poohed Percy's too despondent views on the subject.

After this, however, Percy and he had many snatches of talk together, and the kindly interest raised that night never ceased.

Percy now knew what a true friend meant—one whose influence tended to raise and ennable his character immeasurably.

---

## CHAPTER X.

THERE had been a time of comparative tranquillity ; and, with very few exceptions, both officers and men were lulled into false security.

They thought the Zulus were in front of them, and that the main column—which had left the camp and was advancing—would confront the enemy, and so prevent any possibility of attack on the settlement for the present.

To the north rose a precipitous barren cliff, and ranges of hills stretched away from it eastward, closing in the little camp on two sides ; and to these natural bulwarks they trusted largely for

safety. After the departure of the principal part of the force under the command of the general, the numbers had been reinforced by the arrival of a small body of troops—partly mounted natives, partly regulars—making their strength up to over a thousand men. Small as the number was, it seemed ample to contend with any skirmishing party which was at all likely to come across them; and the pickets, carefully posted on the adjoining hills, reported nothing for several hours, save insignificant passing groups of the enemy.

The men were for the most part busily engaged; some in mending their clothes after a rough soldierly fashion, or polishing accoutrements, and pipe-claying belts; while again there were others, and these nearly all young lads, who were boisterously merry; trying, by gay songs and noisy laughter, to banish from their

minds the terrors that might await them even yet before the war was over; and with these terrors to banish also the thoughts of home and loved ones there, whose faces they were longing to see again.

In a moment there came a lull in the gay talk, broken only by sounds from some distant group, and a thrill of expectancy went through the camp, for suddenly a mounted native dashed in. "They are coming—coming quickly!" he gasped out to the commanding officer; pushing back his cap, and wiping the perspiration from his brow, showing more fully meanwhile the livid hue which had overspread his swarthy face.

Algy Brown, the youngest and most foppish captain in the force, calmly finished examining the sword-belt which his man had failed entirely to clean to his satisfaction; and then, lifting his eyes as

the man passed him on his way to the rear, leading his exhausted horse, asked coolly, "How many?"

His look changed, however, when the answer was given that the Zulus were in immense numbers, probably not much under forty thousand men; and that they were advancing rapidly, having driven the pickets from their posts.

The news spread like wildfire; and after a few, short, sharp orders from the officers, the men, dropping their various avocations, hastily snatched their accoutrements; and formed into order of battle, calm, steady, and silent.

Not a moment too soon, for the Zulus were seen advancing over the hills to the south-east thick as ants!

A company of the Native Contingent rode out to meet them; and hardly was the whole army organized, before firing had begun along the sides of the hills.

This proved only a momentary check to the advancing myriads, for the company was forced to retreat. The Zulus bore down everything, spite of the heavy fire, which did great execution amongst them. But what were a few gaps to such overpowering numbers? They were filled up as soon as made, and the savage horde poured on.

Three companies of the regiment in which Percy was were formed to face the hill over which the enemy was nearing, with two guns in position not far from them.

On came the foe, steadily keeping up a heavy fire, until they were close enough for their assegais to be hurled with effect.

As long as the ammunition lasted, the infantry kept their antagonists a little in check, hundreds falling under the rapid, steady firing; but nothing seemed to daunt them. As the foremost fell others

crowded on, regardless of the dead and dying of their own race they trampled into the dust.

Through it all Percy stood his ground firmly. There had been a moment before the ranks were formed, when, if he could have secured safety by flight, he almost feared he would have sought it.

One wild backward glance, and he set his teeth and frowned; while Sergeant McAllister looked in his eyes and said in a low voice, "Steady, my boy, steady. Think of *her*, and prove yourself a man!" Their hands met for a moment in a rough but earnest grip; after that the young fellow was master of his fears.

He stood the fire in a way marvellous to himself; but there came one sickening moment, when an assegai hissed through the air, and struck down the man next him.

Percy turned white to the lips, then

the blood rushed to his head. After that he fought with a savage fury; the wild beast instinct which makes men enjoy fighting once they are in it, was roused at last; the fever thirst for blood was on him now.

Then came the terrible moment when, putting his hand into his ammunition pouch, he found it empty. After that there was nothing left but the bayonet; and with loud yells the Zulus rushed on, doing frightful execution with their short stabbing assegais.

Little defence were the bayonets to our poor fellows; as the savages bore them down, throwing on their sharp points the dead and wounded; and pressing on resistlessly.

The men kept wonderful order, and fought like heroes; although the sight of their comrades falling on all sides, and the sound of the fiendish exultant cries

from the Zulus, might well have made them waver.

Their ranks were broken; and there was nothing left but to retreat as quickly as possible to what little shelter the camp might afford.

Before, however, the word was given for this, Captain Brown—whose coolness had never for a moment deserted him—did one of the pluckiest and most far-seeing acts recorded of that eventful day, where desperate courage was so common as to make it difficult to single out one deed for remembrance.

There was but one thing left which could render their position more untenable, and this was the chance of their own guns being turned against them. They must be rendered useless. No sooner thought than attempted. The young officer stole quietly out of the ranks, and had succeeded in spiking one

of the guns before his movements were noticed. As he was busy with the other, a rush was made towards him; but Percy —whose quick eye had noted the danger —passed the word along, and with a few others managed to bring the officer back; though not unwounded, for the brave fellow's right arm hung limp and disabled by his side.

A ringing cheer was given by the despairing men, reanimated for a time by the sight of this daring deed.

They retreated, fighting every step of the way, until they gained the vantage ground occupied by some mounted infantry. But the odds were too dreadful.

Out of that band of brave, well-trained soldiers there seemed only a handful left, when compared with the apparently numberless masses of still advancing columns! The mounted infantry did what they could. Their line was as yet

unbroken, and they were fresh and unfagged. Covering the retreat of the disorganized party, they managed to engage the Zulus and keep them momentarily in check.

It was the last stand made on that ill-fated field. The men knew that certain death stared them in the face ; but they fought side by side, and fell bravely at their posts.

In all the annals of the past our men never surpassed the desperate courage, the heroic endurance, the individual daring shown in that battle where so very few escaped to tell the tale.

The game was lost. "My men, it's all up!" groaned Captain Brown, as he saw his friend the cavalry officer fall from his horse. "Save yourselves if you can. There's not a hope but that, or, God knows, I'd be the last to counsel you to fly."

He knew there was no chance for himself ; the loss of blood had made him faint and weak. But he could not bear that the men he loved so well, and who had fought so gallantly, should not have one chance for their lives.

Perhaps the thought was suggested by the words of his captain, for as the frightened horse of the fallen officer dashed past him, Percy seized it by the rein.

“ Mount, for God’s sake, Captain ! ” he cried to his commanding-officer. But Captain Brown hesitated.

“ I don’t know if I can sit it. Take it yourself, Scott ; there’s no time to lose ! ”

“ The horse will carry two,” said Percy, to whom the life of Captain Brown had grown strangely precious since he had already saved it once.

Slowly and painfully the young officer mounted ; but when Percy endeavoured to do the same the beast shied and re-

fused the double load. What was to be done? The chances of escape lessened every moment!

The ranks of the mounted soldiers were broken, and the Zulus were rushing forward with a frantic shout of triumph.

“ Better that one die than both ! ”

With a wild despairing thought of Esther and his child, Percy gave the horse a smart blow with his flat hand; and the next instant it was galloping madly on the only path which remained open, through the camp and out to westward.

The instinct of the animal led it aright; and this was well, for its rider had no power left to guide it. All he could do was to stick to the saddle, and in this he succeeded, though fast losing consciousness.

On looking back afterwards, Captain Brown felt his escape to be miraculous,

as it certainly was ; for out of that terrible slaughter few indeed effected their flight in safety.

He never could bear to speak of it in after days. He was haunted too vividly by the strained but splendid face of the man who had saved his life at the expense of his own.

For Percy Scott was not one of the number who escaped !

## CHAPTER XI.

MR. SCOTT was naturally a staunch conservative, and so likely to adopt all the views of the government then in power.

Nevertheless, no radical in the country was more opposed to the proceedings in South Africa than he became after Percy was ordered out there.

“ What I want to know is this. Why on earth we can’t let those dirty Boers fight their own battles? They may be smooth enough just now when they want our help, but wait until we’ve conquered their enemies for them, and see if they don’t turn round on us pretty quick, and tell us they can manage their own affairs

after all! Precious little credit we'll get from the concern, I can tell you. Why, the probabilities are we'll have to fight them after the savages, and that very soon too!"

This was the old farmer's view of Transvaal politics, and he wasn't so very far wrong either, as subsequent events have proved.

He read the newspapers diligently now, not confining himself, as he was wont to do, to agricultural prospects and the state of the markets. The first place now was given to the news from the Cape.

That there was any great danger to Percy he scarcely imagined, for there had been as yet no record of serious bloodshed; and, like all the rest of his countrymen, he fancied British prowess and British discipline more than a match for any amount of savage valour.

One night early in the year he was

sitting by the fire, thinking over the news he had just finished reading. Nelly and the servants had retired to rest long ago, but the old farmer did not object now to sit up alone *sometimes*. He could escape then from the curious eyes which he used to fancy—with the morbidness of a self-willed man who hated to show his feelings—watched his face for traces of sorrow and remorse.

He was miserable, very miserable at times, and it was a relief to be able to look so.

He tried to picture his boy amidst the strange unfamiliar scenes of that far-off land ; but not being imaginative, this was a little beyond him.

He was a shade more uneasy than he had yet been, for the paper stated that a great battle seemed imminent ; and for aught he knew Percy might be in it.

“ What an obstinate, pig-headed old

fool I have been," he thought, with the first confession of mistake made yet. "I might ha' had the boy with me now if I'd been a bit less hard on him! After all I'd naught again the lass that he fancied; but then it *was* aggravating, any body would agree to that! Such a good-looking lad might ha' had his pick o' the countryside, and there's lots wi' a canny bit o' brass not so far off either! Well, well, it's not much use cryin' over spilt milk, but I wish I'd let him have his way now, all the same. Why, there's Alick Lisle, I've never said a word against him setting up for our Nelly," he went on, some glimmering of his own inconsistency dawning upon his mind; "but then Nelly, poor woman, is easily contented; and there's plenty in the fellow, too. He'll make his mark, never fear! But as for that lad o' mine, if he'd had sense, and set himself to marry well, there's no

knowing where he mightn't have ended ! I always meant to give him a bit more tether when he'd come to a man ; for Lord knows, it wasn't lack of means that made me live as I have done ! I thought it would be safest for the young ones, indeed I did, never guessing how badly it would end ! ”

His pipe was burnt out, but he knocked the ashes from it and refilled it, although it was long past his usual bed-time. He had not felt so wakeful for months.

It was a wild, gusty night. Great surges of wind kept rising and moaning fitfully around the house, then soughing through the distant trees as they died away.

Farmer Scott was not a nervous man usually, but even he was affected by the eerie sound, breaking in as it did upon the stillness of the place, where all slept but himself.

Memory was very busy in him to-night—memory and conscience both.

How much of his sorrow and others' sin had been caused by his own lack of sympathy, his own dogged self-will?

"I would like to have seen the lad in his uniform," he went on musing; "he would make a fine-looking soldier, anyway! And I might have seen him too, if I hadn't been so wrong-headed, and had gone to bid him God-speed! The last chance of being with my boy—ay, maybe the very last—and I chose to save my pride instead! And what would I have thought of him if he *had* allowed himself to be bought off? Ay, but he wasn't such a milksop, thank goodness! Well, well, the war will get over, and God send the boy safe home again! There'll be naught against him coming back to me then, when he's been in the war. Maybe, after all, it was the best thing could

happen to him ; it'll make a man of him if anything will. Once here again he shall find nothing to complain of more. He shall see that his old father is fond of him, ay, and proud of him, too ! And that that father can open his purse as well as his heart when he chooses. As for that poor lass on the hill-side, she'd been a brave and a true one, after all said and done ! It said much for her that she saw herself no fit match for his son, but she should be no loser by that act of right-mindedness. He would take care of her, and her bairn as well ! The whole story would be forgotten in time, and Percy would have forgotten his fancy too before he came back. Many a man well respected by his neighbours had lived down a blacker story than that—— God help us, what's that ? ”

He started to his feet, listening intently.

Yes, there it came again.

The wind had died away for a moment or two, but a still more weird, mournful sound broke the silence.

The sound of the howling of a dog. A prolonged pitiful moan, growing in intensity with each repetition. As the farmer heard it, he grew white to the very lips, and his hands trembled so that his pipe fell on the floor and was broken. Even this did not rouse him.

What was there in the very ordinary noise of a dog howling at night, to shake the nerves of a strong man in this fashion?

Farmer Scott had been brought up in the country, and had insensibly imbibed many of its superstitions.

He knew too well what this strange uncanny sound was held to mean.

He went to the outer door, and unbarring it, looked into the night.

There was a moon in the sky above his head, but not a calm, clear, settled-looking moon by any means. Round it was the luminous halo that speaks of a rising storm ; and great masses of clouds were drifting before the wind.

“A wild sort of a night,” said the farmer, with vague uneasiness ; “but it’s most like to be fine out yonder !”

Again he looked about him, and then he saw what he feared. Hemp, the beautiful black and white colley, that had been Percy’s special property, was sitting there looking towards the house ; and ever and again raising its nose into the air and giving mouth to long plaintive howls.

“*His* dog, too,” muttered Mr. Scott, his superstitious uneasiness increasing. “Hemp, Hemp, come here, sir ; what are you doing there, disturbing folks like this ?”

The dog came towards him as he called.

it by name—but slowly, reluctantly as it were—and, while rubbing itself against his legs, still kept whining.

He called it into the house, and it followed him back to the sitting-room, and stretched on the rug in front of the fire, soon fell asleep; but it was long before its old master could follow its example.

Many an hour he lay sleepless on his bed, oppressed with a vague, miserable presentiment of coming sorrow.

“God send my boy safe back to me,” he cried, in growing dread; “only send him back, and I will try to make it all up to him !”

## CHAPTER XII.

SERGEANT McALLISTER did not forget the promise he had made to his young comrade (of communicating with his friends if anything should happen), although, of course, it was some time before he could keep it.

He himself had been the last to escape from the fatal battle, and then not without being slightly wounded.

He had tried to make sure—or as sure, at least, as was possible in this tragedy, which remained so long shrouded in mystery—that Private Scott had really not been one of the few fortunate survivors.

As soon, however, as he had done this, and recovered a little from his own hurts, he wrote two letters ; one to the girl whose heart he feared would be broken by the news, and the other to the father of the lad. At any rate his letter would reach them sooner than any official statement was likely to do.

He was a tender-hearted man, this grim Scotch sergeant, and the letters he wrote broke the news as gently as possible. To the father he dwelt on the heroism shown by the young soldier ; to the sweetheart he told of the reverential love felt for her, and how much Percy longed to atone for all his past wrongs, and how, at least, he had prayed to die worthy of her. That prayer had been heard.

He left out all details of terror and death, which might wring her loving heart, and ended by a delicately suggested hope that they might be united in Heaven.

Then a thought struck him, and he drew his letter to Mr. Scott towards him again, and added a postscript. It told how Percy had thought of Esther Grey, and of his child, and how he had called her “his wife in the sight of God.”

“Maybe they’ll be pitiful to the puir lassie now,” thought the kindly sergeant, as he closed the letter.

Mr. Scott had grown more gloomy and silent than ever during the last few weeks. Although he would not have confessed it for the world, the superstitious dread aroused in his mind that night he sat by the fire alone, and heard the long eerie howls of Percy’s dog, had clung to his mind; spite of all efforts to dispel it.

Though a very matter-of-fact man, a strong vein of superstition ran through his nature; all the stronger, perhaps, in that he was not sentimental.

He had never told any one of this incident ; in fact, it was not in the nature of things he should confess to such a weakness as was implied in merely noting it ; but he brooded over it, and every time Hemp came near him, turned away with a slight movement of distaste.

Then all the talk of a great battle, about which no particulars could be gathered ; all the mysterious hints, and fears, and probabilities, of which the papers were full, disturbed him greatly.

When the fatal letter came, therefore, he was so full of nameless terrors ; so utterly unhinged by the presentiments of those terrible days of suspense, that his hand trembled almost too much to open it.

What need was there ? His worst fears were confirmed. The very sight of the strange handwriting from Africa told him quite enough. He could tell all that

was written there without breaking the seal.

He would never see his handsome boy again !

Crushed and broken utterly, he tottered into the sitting-room with the still unopened letter in his hand ; and there Nelly found him with so drawn and ghastly a look on his face that she knew instinctively what had happened ; and throwing herself on her knees beside his chair, took his poor nerveless hands in hers, and laid her soft cheek against his, in a vain effort to comfort him ; even while her own eyes were full of unshed tears.

But Esther Grey had no presentiment of danger to her lover to prepare her for the blow.

As time went on she had even begun to hope that happiness might yet be in store for them.

Percy's letters—while he could write—were healthy, manful, hopeful in tone ; and showed such a growth in character as gave her courage to think of the future. He loved her as much as ever, but oh, with what a difference !

His love was changing from the mad, reckless, selfish passion of a boy ; to the steady, faithful affection of a man.

All that he had gone through seemed not only to have hastened this development, but to have rendered it strong enough to last. Surely, she might allow herself to look forward to their meeting now ? Her step grew lighter, almost buoyant again ; and she caught herself humming snatches of song now and then, to her boy's infinite delight.

He was just beginning to toddle, with the help of her finger, and growing a most engaging little fellow ; although Esther could not help seeing, with sorrow,

that her father never seemed to get reconciled to his presence.

So when she could leave, she would take the boy out with her; and away in the sad woods, where no buds yet broke the monotony of the bare brown branches; or down by the most unfrequented river path they would play together, as they never dared to do when the severe eyes of the paralyzed man watched their motions jealously from the arm-chair by the fire; where he now sat pretty constantly.

There, too, Esther could give way to her feelings; had not to wear any longer the mask of settled calmness which sat so closely on her in her home; could give way to her regrets, her fears, her memories, and the new hopes of which she felt half-ashamed.

So she lived through the dreary winter, and the bitter nipping days of February,

---

scarcely noticing how quickly the months went by ; those months she had fancied would drag so.

March came in wild and blustering, a good deal of snow falling, and the wind howling round the little cottage on the hillside ; but the storm only lulled her into deeper sleep at nights.

How she did dream of Percy, though !

Through the day miles and miles of weary waters might sever them ; but what of that, since in her dreams they walked and talked together as of old ? The first of these happy dreams came on a dreary night soon after the year commenced.

She had gone to sleep, desponding, desolate, unemotional ; and behold, her lover came to her ; came radiant in beauty and happiness ; and comforted her, as nothing else could.

After this there was scarce a night

when they were not together ; in dream-land their spirits met and were happy.

What wonder that the girl went about now with a light in her eyes, and a smile on her lips ; and that she could sing her child to sleep as happy, lawful mothers do ?

Adam Grey noted these little signs of hopefulness, and hated them.

“ She thinks of him still—curse him ! ” he muttered, viciously.

“ There’d be no sin in wishing such a one as him never to come back ! He’d be out of more mischief then.”

At length came that terrible day in the beginning of March, which brought simultaneously to two homes such sorrowful tidings.

Esther was luckily alone in the kitchen when she received her letter ; for Mr. Grey, having rather a bad turn that day, felt unable to get into the chair in which

Esther wheeled him from one room into the other, and decided to remain in bed until the afternoon at all events ; and little Percy was very much engrossed with some bright-coloured beads and buttons she had found for him.

Esther's heart gave one great throb of wonder and dread, as she saw the strange writing, and the postmarks ; in a moment she skimmed the letter through, without in the least taking in the meaning of it. She put her hand to her head in a dazed, stupid kind of way. A film came over her eyes when she tried again to grasp what the letter meant.

Patiently she waited till this passed off, and then made another effort.

At last, at last the truth forced itself in upon her mind. No doubt of it remained to her ; no hopeful incredulity ; no rebellion against belief. It was simply fate. After that what more was there to say ?

How had she dared to expect a happy ending for such a love as theirs? She wondered now—with a hard, unemotional, dreary sort of wonder—how she could have been such a fool!

No tears—no healing, blessed tears—came to her relief as she sat on there, perfectly still and motionless; her face growing appalling in its marble fixity. Tears are for the sorrows which are capable of being lightened, not for such as hers.

Little Percy coming to claim his mother's interest in some of his baby tricks, stood looking at her with round frightened eyes.

Was this his pretty mamma, with never a smile or a caress for her darling? The little one hid his face in her dress and began to whimper, stopping every few minutes to see if she would take any notice.

But she disengaged herself from his clinging little hands, gently, though firmly.

“ Go and play, dear,” she said, in a quiet, but hard voice; and the child obeyed reluctantly, every now and then glancing back at her to see if she had changed her mind.

There was no fun to be got out of mamma to-day, he thought, in petulant astonishment, and at last gave up the attempt to attract her.

Not a word did Esther speak of her grief; no explanation did she give to any one of the change that was visible in her demeanour; and luckily for her the illness which had confined her father to bed on the day of the arrival of the letter kept him there for some days after, and prevented him taking as much notice as he would otherwise have done.

But still he saw that something must

have occurred ; and of course before he had been long up again, he heard from a neighbour the news which Esther had never confided to him. How was this, he wondered ?

“ Why did you never tell me what had happened to young Scott ? ” he asked at length, rather querulously. The idea of anything being kept from *him* ! Was he not the centre round which all the domestic machinery ought to move ?

“ Why should I have told you ? ” she asked, calmly ; “ he was nothing to you, and you hated him. You might have shown your pleasure, perhaps, and do you think that would have comforted me ? ”

The old man answered not a word. Perhaps he was conscious of a sort of joy at the young scoundrel having met his deserts ; but he had at least the grace not to flaunt this before his daughter, and

seeing he could say nothing sympathetic, managed to hold his tongue—perhaps, after all, the wisest thing he could have done.

## CHAPTER XIII.

ALICK's "Justice and Truth" was a decided hit. It had both paid well and been much talked of; and now his contributions to magazines and reviews were accepted eagerly. His papers on Pauperism, too, had greatly increased his celebrity; for they were written in a realistic style, and had both force, grip, and eloquence.

He was a rising man, and he knew it. Although of course far from rich yet, he was perfectly able to maintain himself comfortably, and even to gratify some of his more refined tastes. His ~~—~~ appearance now bore very few marks of ~~—~~

his early hardships. A trifling brusquerie of manner; a slight touch of the northern dialect when excited; a long, swinging step, telling of much out-door exercise; and a complexion more sunburnt than that of the average town man—these were the only signs left of his old life and up-bringing.

He was possessed of a strong and wiry physique, which gave him almost unlimited working power. And now that love must be allowed no place in his life, he threw himself with all the force of his nature into his work.

Besides the numberless social essays, political papers, or mere nature sketches, he was continually throwing off, and which served to keep his name before the public; he had almost completed another book, upon which he had spent the bulk of his time since his engagement with Nelly had been cancelled.

Embittered by his suffering, and fettered no longer by respect for either Church or State, he had broken through the last figments of reserve he had till now kept about his theological and social opinions.

His former work had truly enough been a virulent attack on much of the current theology, and on the professors of Christianity ; this went further, it attacked Christianity itself. It was, in parts, a passionate outcry, not only against the God he had been taught to worship, but against any God at all.

He had seen injustice, falsehood, and cruelty triumph ; had fought times out of number for the right, only to be vanquished utterly. His renunciation of his love, for what he believed to be truth, had been followed—as was only perhaps natural—by a wild rebellion against everything.

Even the longing to believe had now left him.

Life was too cruel, too entirely hopeless, to have been caused by a beneficent Deity.

All the flood of infidelity that had rushed into his soul after Dick Hepple's condemnation, and had been temporarily driven back at the time of the death of Nelly's mother, and his own engagement, flowed on now more resistlessly than ever.

Better a thousand times no God at all, than one his mind refused to call good ; a God who either did not know, or did not care, what went on in the earth He had made ! Many of the thoughts contained in " Justice and Truth " are old now ; and men have managed to fit much that was true in them into their existing beliefs ; and the human race still continues its search for God, and still believes occasionally that it finds Him.

But his new book was a more dangerous one.

The man's nature was so pure ; his sympathy with suffering so intense ; his love of good so ardent ; his past struggle for belief so evident ; and his conclusion so utterly hopeless ; that any reader who could have read it carefully, and then laid it down with his confidence unshaken, must either have been of a faith almost apostolic, or else well-nigh sublime in his stupidity.

The struggle was over, and the determination made to live for the present, and the present only ; to fight the wrong as far as he was able, without hope of reward hereafter, and with a pretty fair certainty of getting the worst of it here. This was what Alick had come to, and he tried "to grasp night's black blank mystery, and wear it for a spiritual garb, creed proof."

In a degree he succeeded. There came to him no violent temptation. Evil seemed no more attractive to him, because there was no longer a God to help him in his struggle against it. And yet, although he scarcely acknowledged it, there *was* a change in him.

His old love of the fields and the woods seemed dead, for he felt so utterly alone and miserable in them.

And yet, when in the city, he could come across naught but sorrow and sin.

Had life grown sadder, or had his youth suddenly left him, that there seemed so little joy, so little purity, so little, in fact, of anything worth living for ?

Love !

What did it mean ? At best a passionate clinging together of two drowning souls soon to be sunk under the dark waters of oblivion.

Horrible ! When he did give way to

the longing of his own heart, and allowed Nelly's well-remembered face to rise before his fancy, a skull appeared too, and mocked him with a ghastly grin.

Overwork must be making him morbid ; and yet he found it impossible to rest.

The only person he saw much of at this time was Cameron. For the friendship between the two was now firmer than ever, and Alick sadly dreaded losing sight of him, even for a time.

Although Cameron had retained his office of secretary to Mrs. Dalrymple Dobbs longer than any of his predecessors, the time at length came when he grew very tired of it. What between the æsthetics and Mrs. Dobbs' hopelessly entangled English and exceedingly defective grammar, he had rather a bad time of it ; and although the pay was good, he felt that he could not stand it much longer.

However, just when he had made up his mind to leave, Mr. Gauntlett, the great African traveller, who had been drawn to Cameron that first time at Mrs. Dobbs' *soirée*, and had found the attraction increase on further acquaintance, having heard Donald express a wish to leave the secretaryship, made him a very tempting offer.

This was to revise and edit notes and journals of the route lately taken by Mr. Gauntlett and five of his friends across the centre of the great continent. They were to be published in book form almost immediately, and the traveller found the labour too heavy for himself alone, especially at the time he wanted rest.

Needless to say, Cameron accepted this offer with effusion—not only because Mr. Gauntlett's proffered remuneration seemed to him to be fabulously liberal—

but because it was work he would delight in, and do thoroughly well.

So much, indeed, did he complete it to Mr. Gauntlett's satisfaction, and so firm a friendship did there grow up between the men, that the traveller did not—after the fashion of the world he was almost a stranger to—throw Donald aside as soon as he had completed the work given him. Instead, he exerted his influence to find more employment of the same kind, or similar, for Cameron.

Now Mr. Gauntlett's nephew, young Lord Aberchristie, was a musician of no mean powers, and a composer as well.

His pretty ballads were sung at all concerts, and popular in all drawing-rooms; and he was very proud of the nice little income he derived from this talent of his. Amusingly proud, considering that the revenues of his several

estates were almost fabulous. But writing songs was his hobby ; and accordingly he worked at it morning, noon, and night, as though his very livelihood depended on the money it would bring in.

What bothered him most was the word part of them !

He affected homely little snatches of song, crooning little ditties ; and the poetry of the day was so terribly unsuitable for these. So when his uncle drew his attention to a few of Donald's pretty bits of verse, he was all eagerness directly. Why, this was the very man he had been seeking ! Bless me, why was he never told of him before ?

If this poet had been made for him, he couldn't have suited better !

He hoped his uncle was about done with this Mr. Cameron ; for, after all, was it not a shame to waste such gifts over editing scientific, dry rubbish that

any college muff or other would manage quite as well ?

The great man smiled. He had given his life, his hopes, his ambition, his fortune in the cause of science. And this was how such a sacrifice was esteemed.

Scientific rubbish, indeed ! And this from a little whipper-snapper of a boy that he had dandled on his knee only the other day.

Well, the end of it was that Cameron had plenty of work for his pen, and in the way of all others he liked best.

If he could never be a very great poet, at least he bid fair to be a very popular one ; and had the solid satisfaction, too, of being well paid for his work, which is more than most poetasters can say. Lord Aberchristie introduced him to his publishers, and they introduced him to other song writers ; and so it was that Donald Cameron at last made his position

in the world, which had been so long in opening before him.

Alick Lisle was at a loss to understand the change that came over his friend at this time. Cameron grew hopeful, cheerful, bright, instead of the depressed, melancholy being of old.

Coming home together from a long country walk, Alick ventured to banter him a little on the transformation.

“Ay, lad, it’s true enough I’m changed ; and there’s guid reason for it too ! I’ve thought whiles o’ tellin’ ye the burden I’ve borne all these years ; but sin’ there wasna’ a chance o’ gettin’ rid on’t, I didna’ care to speak ! ”

Here Cameron paused, while they walked on in silence, Alick only wishing he had never broached the subject. He ought surely to have known better !

“It was my father,” continued Donald, after a while. “Ye’ll ha’, maybe, wondered

how I never mentioned kith or kin belongin' to me? He and I were alone at the last. Mother and the weans ane after anither sickened and died; and we were sore down i' the warld, and ower oor ears i' debt. I was meant for a meenister in those days, Alick, and I'd set my mind on goin' awa' to college; but there was little chance o' that, when the time came, and I had even to give up my calling. Maybe it was as well too," he added, with a touch of humour. "I'd most like to have been a 'stickit' one, and a stickit meenister's waur than a stickit poet, after all! Weel, it was a sair trouble all the same, my man, but naught to what came after! My father was a clerk, and a poorly paid one, and it was a great pity he should have had large sums of money through his hands every day——"

Cameron's voice faltered; and Alick

tried to stop him in these evidently painful reminiscences, but vainly.

“No, no, Alick; I’d rather tell ye all now I’m started! And I dare say you’ve guessed the rest. He’d been badgered by a severe creditor, and I fancy his brain was a trifle affected by the amount o’ trouble he’d had. Anyway, the temptation proved too strong for him—you understand?”

Alick nodded silently.

“It was a matter o’ something like three hundred pounds; and of course it was found out—but not immediately. Day by day the puir man went about wi’ the terror o’ discovery hangin’ over him, until he nigh went mad wi’ the strain! Weel, it all cam’ oot to me one nicht when we were alone together i’ the gloamin’. Lad that I was then, he told me the haill sad, sinfu’ story! How he’d lost hope first wi’ a’ the sorrow that had

been showered upon him, and felt as though there were no God to care either what he did, or what came of him. And how it seemed as if tryin' to do the richt was the sure way to the poorhouse, although the meenisters micht say it led to heaven. *They* micht find it pay here, he thocht bitterly, but no one else could ! ”

“ He'd been hearin' some o' your sort, Alick, and his mind wasna' strong eneuch to bear the stuff some o' you seem little the waur o' ! ”

“ Oh, God, I canna bear to think how hard I was on him, puir heart-broken creature that he was ; for I turned awa' from him, and stood by the window luikin' out into the nicht, never heeding him, or what he was doin'. I was stunned like for the time being. Honour, respect, reverence, all gone it seemed to me ! Suddenly, there cam' a loud knock to the

door, and before I could turn round it was followed by the report o' a pistol. He had guessed aright. It was the warrant for his apprehension, and he was prepared for it ! ”

“ He was dying when the man entered the room ; but before then I was kneeling by his side, soothing him all I could. I swore then by all that I held sacred, to pay the money and clear his name, if it took me all my life to do it ; and that seemed to comfort him at the last.”

Alick was silent as his friend finished speaking. He understood now the close grinding economy which used to puzzle the village folks, and which had earned the undeserved appellation of miser for Cameron.

Ah, yes ; and he understood, too, the sorrow with which Cameron had always regarded his own scepticism ! Poor

Cameron ! Was there not ample reason for his dread ?

“ I’d saved a trifle at Fordham ; but it was slow work,” went on the elder man. “ I thought the poems would, maybe, be a quicker way to it ; but ye know all about that, and how I lost everything. But, oh, Alick, the Lord’s been very guid to me ; I see my way now to do it, and maybe the interest on it, too, before long ! Do ye wonder I look a different man, eh ? ”

“ No, indeed,” muttered Alick ; and then rousing himself he began to try and express the sympathy he certainly felt for his poor friend.

Suddenly, Nettlè, Dick Hepple’s dog—which Alick still had with him, and which, spite of a lingering lameness, insisted upon following her new master, whenever he would allow her—gave a sharp, joyful bark, and darted forward.

It was already growing dusk, but in the

clear frosty air, Alick could discern a figure leaning over the parapet of a little bridge they were nearing.

Nettle flew to this figure, and jumped, and whined, and rubbed her head caressingly against its legs.

In a moment Alick guessed who it was ; and stepping up quickly, laid his hand on Dick Hepple's shoulder.

“ Why, Dick, old fellow, I thought I was never to see you again,” he exclaimed, kindly ; “ where are you bound for now ? ”

“ Where ? For the devil, maybe ! ” answered Dick, laconically.

The tone in which he spoke, and the wild, haggard look of the face he turned on Alick, made the latter attach more meaning to the words than he might otherwise have done. Dick in his turn laid hold of Alick's arm roughly.

“ Tell me if it's true what I've heered

—that yon scoundrel is dead?" he hissed between his teeth.

"Who do you mean?" asked the other quietly; looking steadfastly at Dick, and trying by sheer force of will to calm his sudden passion.

"Mean! Don't ye bother to shield him now, as ye did once before," replied the man, savagely; "who could I mean but that damned scoundrel, Percy Scott?"

"Only to think o' the devil cheatin' me o' my due at the last!" he went on with a bitter laugh; "he needn't ha' troubled, I'd ha' sent him to hell fast enough, if I'd only gotten the chance!"

"Be quiet, Dick," said Alick, sternly; "he's beyond your reach now happily. And whatever his life might have been, his death was noble!"

But Alick's words only seemed to add fury to the fire.

Dick had found it no easy task to find Percy—alone and unaided as he was. People were shy of giving information to a man with the stigma of the gaol upon him.

Dick had not long found out that Percy had enlisted when the regiment were ordered out to Africa, and the troops sailed before Dick could manage to get face to face with the man he chose to consider his enemy. This, of course, made him savage. Men like Dick, with the instinct of the hunter in them, do not like to be balked of their prey.

After this he heard of Esther's return to Fordham with her baby ; but he did not care to go near her. Her life had been spoilt ; but still Dick knew enough of women to make quite sure that she would try to screen her betrayer. He would have made the fellow marry her, or —

Alick stood horror-stricken at the outburst which followed his words.

Hate, love, vengeance, blasphemy, mingled in mad passionate utterances—With all his experience of life Alick had never heard the like before.

How powerless he felt to stem the torrent!

What could he find to say to this madman whose rage—fearful to witness as it was—was yet partly righteous.

“Oh, don’t, Dick, don’t! You’ll be awfully sorry for this after!” he said, appealingly; “he was not so bad as you think either; for it’s true, as I told you before, that he wanted to do the right thing by her, but she refused to marry him!”

Dick broke into a mocking laugh.

“Oh, Lord, you needn’t tell lies to save him now! I can do him no harm, though the will’s not wantin’! Don’t I tell you the devil’s cheated me?”

Donald Cameron had come up to them

before this; and was standing a little aside, listening sorrowfully to this dialogue. He would not interfere at first.

Alick was so clever, surely he would know how to deal with this poor frenzied fellow?

But no; Alick stood silent, powerless, stupefied. His fine axioms and moralities—well as they read on paper—gave him no hold on such a case as this.

Cameron gave him a reproachful look, and then stepped forward.

“Dick, my man, did ye no think it micht be God and no’ the devil that had thwarted ye? Ye micht ha’ been led on to black murder—and murder o’ a comparatively innocent man, too! It’s no’ the devil’s way to hinder folks fra jobs like you, I can tell ye that. Ye oucht to thank God he’s kept ye back from it instead, my man!”

Underlying all the mad blasphemy, the

mad rebellion of Dick's words, there was in his soul an undercurrent of something approaching to religion. Perhaps the very passion of his outburst evidenced that it was a pent up tide breaking through some barrier.

Be that as it may, Donald Cameron's words had certainly an effect on him; possibly more from the earnest conviction with which they rang, than that they were specially well chosen.

“God!” repeated the man, roughly, but not irreverently; “do ye think He's likely to concern Himself wi' such as me, now?”

But after this he listened quietly to the story Cameron told very well, the story of Percy's repentance, and Esther's resolution.

“It clean beats me why she didn't take him at his word,” Dick broke out after a period of meditation; “but, Lord, I

couldn't understand the likes o' her if 'twas ever so," this he added in the reverential tone in which people used to speak of the God they worshipped.

The three men had walked on together, but when they got to a more populous neighbourhood, Dick stopped abruptly.

"I'll bid ye both good-night now," he said, in a softened sort of way, and turned off up a side-street.

Poor Nettle gave one last puzzled look at Alick; and then, true to her sex, found the old love stronger than the new, and rushed after Dick.

"That's richt, Nettle," said Cameron, quietly, "it'll do him all the good in the world to have ye back. Love's a gospel even a bit beastie like yon can preach well at times, Alick!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE first shock and benumbing agony of grief over, Esther took up once more the routine of her daily life; attending carefully as ever to the querulous wants of her father; who, with the egotism of a selfish invalid, was no less exacting in his demands because of his daughter's crushing sorrow.

He missed something, though what it was he could not have defined; and he felt more wretched and more irritable than he was wont to do.

For the girl had no longer any sympathy to give him, nor did there pass from her that strange magnetic power of soothing, always exercised over enfeebled

invalids by loving, healthy creatures. It seemed almost as though he was being waited on by an automaton.

Looking back on those days, it always appeared to Esther as though she had moved about in a trance. As though her soul had for the time being gone out of her, and was wandering in search of her beloved.

She could not weep ; she could not even sigh ; and her boy smiled up in her face without awaking the slightest response. Even her love for him was torpid. What wonder ?

Her whole being was one agonizing regret, and left no room for other feelings.

She had driven her lover from her ; driven him forth to his death.

And the high ideal of duty that had made her do it, seemed, in the light of the terrible result, a mistake ; and what she then fancied self-sacrifice, now looked

a subtle form of selfishness, which had been willing to risk *him*, body and soul, so long as *she* made one step upwards in her own self-esteem.

There had been a hope latent in her heart, which had served to sustain her through all those dreary months. A hope that in the far distant future, when passion and youth alike were dead, Percy and she might meet again ; and so meeting might find it possible to atone to one another for the wrong they had done to each to each.

But now, with a heart frozen by despairing sorrow, Esther moved about in her household duties ; or sat brooding by the little window of the cottage, looking out on the snow-covered fields—for the parting grip of winter was a keen one that year, and came with a downfall of snow and hail.

Unconsciously, she found a sympathy

in the aspect of nature. The dreary monotony, the bitter cold, the gleaming whiteness—all seemed to accord with her idea that the whole earth was wrapped in a huge winding sheet.

It jarred upon her when the first prophecies of spring were whispered by the soft west wind, as its warm breath kissed the frozen ground, and sent the life current flowing through it again; when the snows melted quickly under the growing power of the sun's rays, and tufts and bunches of greenery peered out; when snowdrops and crocuses appeared in bright specks of colour here and there in the little garden.

All spoke of hope; and hope—was it not sacrilege when Percy could come back no more?

And yet, imperceptibly, there came a change in her frozen mood, with this change in that of nature.

She began to long now to revisit every scene which could bring back one remembrance of Percy.

She seemed to feel a little *nearer* to him as she wandered *through* the fields, or along the woodland path, where they had so often lingered together; above all, the old mill and its gloomy stream attracted her.

Sometimes she would take her boy with her; he could walk now very nicely. Oftener she would steal out when he lay asleep, and did not need her.

She had him with her, however, one afternoon, and the little fellow toddled along by her side contentedly enough; supporting himself bravely by clasping his baby hand firmly around one of her thin, white fingers.

But when she, his mother, seated herself on one of the rough stones that bordered the mill-dam, and divesting

herself of the old plaid she had wrapped about her, placed him on it—the instinct of motherhood guiding her, pre-occupied as she was, to keep him from the damp, cold ground—the poor little man began to weary for some amusement.

“Play with me, mammy,” he lisped, and tugged at her dress, and looked up beseechingly with his dark velvety eyes, in a way no happy mother could possibly have resisted. But Esther’s heart was busy with the past, and a wan smile was the only response to his appeal.

How could she come out of this wonderful dream of that hour when her lover had for the first time held her in his arms, and they had read in each other’s eyes the secret of their love? Again she seemed to feel his kisses on her lips, and she covered her face with her hands, although there were no tears to hide. Perhaps she was unconsciously

trying to shut out the loneliness of the present?

Little Percy, seeing there was no fun in mammy to-day, began to look out other sources of amusement for himself; and crept quietly away, pulling at the rushes and long tufts of last year's grasses growing near. Then with intense delight he saw a butterfly flutter out of them—a poor battered specimen of a peacock butterfly, that had just awakened from its winter sleep, with the glories of its autumn plumage sadly tarnished; but it was none the less a creation of surpassing loveliness to wee Percy. He clapped his fat hands delightedly as it fluttered about among the withered grasses, or alighted momentarily on a patch of olive moss fringing a stone by the water's edge.

He followed it as well as he could, tumbling over the rough stones; but

picking himself up and going steadily on, with that extreme perseverance, in quest of a flitting object, which is almost pathetic in babyhood ; until he followed it to the edge of the dam.

Then he forgot it in peeping over into the water, rippling in the gentle wind, and all the ripples glorified by the glow of the afternoon sun. How nice it would be if he could manage to get hold of one of those ripples !

“ Ah, yes,” Esther thought, “ this is for ever the dearest to me, because here he told me of his love.” And then came another memory with the memory of her past happiness, that of the melancholy ill-omened cry which had made them start asunder that evening. It had, indeed, boded misfortune to them and to their love. With a shudder she rose from her seat, and as she did so there was a sudden splash and a frightened cry.

It did not take her an instant to comprehend what had happened.

The widening circles in the water were the only signs of where the boy had fallen. Frantically she rushed to save him, or perish with him—she did not stop to think which.

Luckily, however, there had been another witness to the accident; for as she flew to the bank, a rough-looking man rushed there also from the mill. It was Dick Hepple, who had found the half-ruinous place a safe and sufficient lodging for the day or two he meant to stay in the neighbourhood; and who for the last half-hour had been watching Esther with pity for which he could find no voice in his heart. He longed to speak to her, to try and comfort her even. But what right had he to speak to her now, when there had been nothing but bitter hate in his feelings for the man she mourned? . . .

He had scarcely noticed the child, save when in the first moment his eyes fell on it with a spasm of jealous anger; but when he saw the mother start up wildly and rush to the water, he remembered seeing it creep towards the pool.

“Stand back, now!” Ye shan’t do it, I tell ye,” he cried, laying his powerful hand upon her arm and pulling her back. Then he plunged in himself readily enough.

He knew the danger, for the water was deeper than it looked; and was much swollen by the rush of melted snow from the hills; and where the child had fallen in there was a strong current caused by part of the old dam itself having broken down. The light body of the little fellow might only too easily be swept down the stream, or dashed against the masonry yet standing.

It was far from safe even for Dick,

impeded as he was with heavy boots and thick clothing, which dragged him down; and with the water, where shallowest, up to his neck.

He lost his footing more than once, recovering it with difficulty; but fortunately, the thick branch of an old tree lying the water's edge had been blown down, and lay overhanging the stream; and he caught it just as he had succeeded in grasping the child and felt himself sinking exhausted with his exertions.

He struggled to the bank, the child in his arms; but the little rounded face was white and motionless, and an ugly blotch was perceptible on the forehead, where the thick rings of dark hair lay wet.

“He’s only stunned a bit, I reckon!” said Dick, as he laid the small white body in Esther’s arms.

But the mother had no such hope.

Why should she? God evidently

meant to take away from her all she loved !

Her agonized face, as for a single moment she lifted it in wild defiance to the sky, appalled poor Dick ; but he had the wisdom to be silent.

He took up the plaid and wrapped it round little Percy, but at first did not offer to carry him. He thought the mother would like to feel her child near her again.

They moved on a few yards together ; but the shock had been too great, and Esther's limbs tottered under the burden.

“ Ye'd, maybe, better let me have him ? I'll hold him just as ye tell me ! ” said the strong man, humbly ; and Esther placed her boy in the arms where he lay so lightly.

The road which led from the old mill to the cottage was a lonely one ; but not very far on it was crossed by a bridle-path

leading to the village. It so happened that Farmer Scott, who had just been there with letters for the post, was returning by this path, when the group came in view.

He had known Esther well enough by sight in the old time, before all this trouble came ; but he scarcely recognized her at first in this tall majestic-looking woman, who walked by the side of Dick Hepple.

Her figure had developed since he had seen her ; and the tightly fitting black dress showed it to advantage, divested as she was of the plaid which served her for shawl. There was a queenly stateliness about it now in place of the former girlish grace ; and grief had made the mobile face, in which the colour used to come and go, statuesque and marble-hued ; while the eyes were no longer veiled and dreamy, but wide-open, as of one who has been

awakened roughly from happy visions to a world of stern and cruel facts.

With head erect, crowned as it were by sorrow, she unconsciously made appeal for homage; and spite of all the misery that had come to him through her, Mr. Scott paid this in his heart. In the same moment there came to him a revelation of the intensity of her suffering.

She had come out of the furnace purified and ennobled; and the old man had the honesty to recognize this, as all unwittingly he gauged the heat of the fire by the purity of the gold which had been through it.

But it was not the sight of Esther after all that moved him, it was the pallid little face hanging on Dick's shoulder; the face which was his own flesh and blood; all that was left of his dead son.

What a pang it sent through him as it took him back years ago, to the time when his boy was a wee fellow like that, and lay in his arms, and went to sleep on his breast ; when the mother, who should have cradled him on her own, had left him no tenderer, softer resting-place.

The old man's pride and anger were melted at once at the sight.

“ Take care of him, Dick, my man ! ” he cried, in a voice broken by emotion ; “ I'll ride on to the doctor's at once.”

And without waiting for an assent, the brown mare's head was turned back towards the village.

---

## CHAPTER XV.

**FARMER** SCOTT was a little ashamed of his sudden thaw after a day or two had passed, and felt somewhat shy and awkward when he remembered how he had committed himself.

He heard that the little fellow had rallied, but that a feverish attack had sat in, and that danger was not quite over even yet.

Still, spite of the anxiety which he could not but acknowledge to himself, he shrank from going to the cottage to make direct inquiries.

Instead, he wandered restlessly about, longing to see the boy again, and won-

dering if he was really as like Percy as he seemed in that first moment ?

It was on one of these aimless rambles that he came across Dick Hepple ; who, unwilling to leave the neighbourhood until he was sure Esther's child was spared to her, was still hanging about. Dick's original intention had been merely to revisit Fordham, and then to set out on tramp again, never to return.

There was another reason also, though it was unacknowledged, for his remaining, and a strange one in a man of such wandering habits ; this was love to the place itself.

A love which had deepened and grown stronger now that he had found the world outside of his native village so hard and cruel.

Yet, though he longed to stay, how was it possible ? Squire Sutton, on whose land he used to work, would employ him

no more ; and the tenant-farmers did not venture to engage a man notoriously under the ban of their landlord.

Dick was decidedly under a cloud, and he felt it keenly when his neighbours shunned him as a “gaol-bird.”

He was sitting disconsolately enough at the foot of an old dyke, which divided Mr. Scott’s land from the road, and poor Nettle was between his knees, alternately pushing her head into his hands, and whining when she saw a rabbit pop past to its hole. The ruling passion was strong in her yet, though for the future she would have to trust to cunning, rather than swiftness, in capturing her prey ; and, to do her justice, she was well supplied with the former.

Dick touched his fur cap as Mr. Scott came up ; but was somewhat surprised when the old man stopped, and still more so when he offered him a job on his land ;

for Dick knew he had never been in favour with Farmer Scott, since he had been the first to tell him of his son's wrong-doing.

At first Dick was at a loss to account for the change; but it dawned on him, when, having been at work killing rabbits for a day or two, Mr. Scott came up to him as he was trudging along one morning, after going round his traps, with a sackful of rabbits.

“ You might take a couple to old Grey as you go by; maybe he might fancy a taste for a change; and if ye'll just tell me how the little lad is, when ye come back, I'd like to hear. It's well you were there, Dick, when it happened, or I doubt he would never have been got out alive; and he's a fine bit chap; it would have gone hard with his mother to lose him.”

Mr. Scott turned away hastily.

---

It had cost him an effort, and a great one, to make even this small overture; but his heart was aching for the little fellow, all that was left of his dead son.

Meanwhile, his daughter, in her loneliness and desolation, after her separation from Alick, had grown to think oftener of that other lonely woman, who lived so near, and yet whom she had never seen since her return with her baby to the little cottage on the hill. Now, too, there had come over her a yearning wish to see the child that was so nearly related to her. The girl's heart cried out for something upon which to lavish the love that was lying waste within it; the instinctive motherliness of true womanhood was awakening, and refused to be silenced.

But how could she bring her maiden pride to acknowledge this woman, who was the mother of the boy she so longed to see and to caress?

Could she ever forgive her ?

It seemed impossible at first ; still, as the months rolled on, and she heard of Esther's devotion to her unlovable old father ; of her loneliness, and the shame which kept her so secluded ; of her passionate love to the little one ; Nelly's heart relented.

She *could* not be all bad this girl ; and she was so young, scarce older than herself ; and it was not wonderful she should have loved Percy ; the wonder would have been if any girl could have helped it.

Nelly's resentment and righteous indignation had softened down to this stage before the news of her brother's death had arrived ; and now her grief made her still more merciful to the woman whom Percy had designated as " his wife in the sight of God."

Percy had honoured her ; had thought

himself unworthy of her even. Nelly could not understand it; but, surely, if he felt like that, his sister had been too hard in her condemnation.

Then Nelly had all a woman's wish for sympathy in sorrow, and instinctively she knew that Esther's grief would be even greater than her own; and, oh, if it had not been for that one sin, they might have wept together, and comforted one another!

She knew her father grieved, but still she little dreamed how much; he was a man, and men did not like to speak about their sorrow, and only grew cross and irritable when they were unhappy; and she wanted some one who would talk of the dear one lost to them.

She had heard of the child's narrow escape from drowning, and now of his serious illness, and all the sweeter impulses of the girl were roused to their

utmost, as she thought of him, and of the poor heart-stricken mother, who might be called upon to part with her last treasure.

Again and again Nelly tried to speak of them to her father ; but not knowing of the change wrought in his feelings by the sight of little Percy, she dare not venture, and no more did she dare to make any overtures without his permission.

She was busy in the kitchen, on the afternoon of the day Mr. Scott sent the rabbits to the cottage, and her mind was running—not on the ironing she was doing—but on the little sick child.

Suddenly Dick Hepple put his head in at the door, and asked for Mr. Scott.

On hearing the farmer was not in the house, Dick hesitated and looked awkward.

“ Can I give him any message ? ” asked

Nelly, "or will you look for him on the farm?"

"Maybe you'd do as well, miss, though I dinna know if it would be to his liking——" And the man stopped abruptly.

He knew what he wished to say; knew that, if he could enlist Nelly's sympathy, it would be much better than even that of Mr. Scott himself; for he had seen that Esther looked worn out with nursing and anxiety, and sadly needed a woman's tender help; but Dick did not know how to manage.

"Oh, I always take messages for him when he is out; so you need not be afraid, Dick; I won't forget," said Nelly, encouragingly.

"Then, if ye'll just tell him the bairn is gettin' worse, they fear; and auld Grey sends his best thanks for the rabbits;" and Dick hurried off, wisely leaving his

news to produce its own effect without more words from him.

As for Nelly, she was too much surprised at the new view of her father's feelings, to even think of recalling the man to hear more.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THOUGH the dread of her father's anger was greatly diminished by what she had heard from Dick Hepple, it was yet with a sadly palpitating heart, and after the conquering of many scruples, that Nelly Scott set out on her way to the hillside cottage.

What would she find to say when she got there?

A thousand difficulties presented themselves.

She reached the little garden-wicket, and passed through it up to the door, before she had in the least made up her mind how to introduce herself.

But, although she did not know it, it was in reality well that she was thus thrown on the promptings of her loving woman's heart. They did much better for her than the hard conventionalities ~~—~~ she might otherwise have trusted to.

A brief "Come in" responded to her ~~—~~ timid knock. There were few visitors ~~—~~ there; and Esther thought simply of ~~—~~ Dick or old Kitty when she called out.

So Nelly suddenly found herself standing in the little kitchen, face to face with ~~—~~ the girl she had longed, yet dreaded, to meet.

They were alone, too, save for the child; who lay tossing restlessly from side to side of the cot, over which Esther was leaning when Nelly entered.

Esther's face grew even whiter than before when she saw who her visitor was, and she could find no words to greet her. As for Nelly, she gave one shy, startled

glance at the tall, stately figure confronting her; and then, instead of feeling that she had conferred a favour in coming, suddenly became conscious that she had taken a great liberty instead. What little courage she had managed to raise vanished utterly at that.

Unconsciously, perhaps, this sweet, pure-natured girl—who would unhesitatingly have held out a hand of cordiality to one ever so far below her; who, spite of her father's wealth and superior position, mixed freely enough with the lower-class village folk, and never fancied she was patronizing them—had, until the moment when she looked in Esther's face, prided herself not a little on her unsullied womanhood; and from its lofty pedestal looked down on the sister-souls, whose contact with the world had not left them so unspotted, with something like contempt. Now, however, as she

saw the noble face, with the story of sin, suffering, and repentance written on every line of brow, cheek, and mouth ; a strange new humility came over the one who had never known temptation to wrong-doing.

She felt that the whiteness of her own nature looked dim besides the polished silver of the other, which had parted from its dross in the furnace and come forth pure again.

It was with a trembling lip, and a sweet, apologetic tone that Nelly broke the momentary silence during which they had looked at one another.

“ Dick told me that the baby was very, very ill—and if I could do anything to help you, I would like it, please, Esther ! ” she said, pleadingly ; then noticing the other’s hesitation, and mistaking its cause, her eyes filled with tears. “ Oh, if you only knew how much I long to

see and be near my—my brother's child, you wouldn't turn me away!"

"Your brother's child? You call *him* that, my little nameless one—my darling, my innocent darling!" cried Esther, trembling all over.

Then she softly drew aside the curtain shading the little cot.

"Come and look at him if you will," she said, softly. "He, at least, is guiltless!"

A spasm of pain shot across the face of the young mother as she spoke.

For if Nelly—good little Nelly—felt humbled, what must poor Esther have been? As she looked at the innocent, childlike face before her, all the old shame and humiliation which had slumbered lately (drugged, as it were, by the opiate of her great sorrow) reawakened suddenly.

"And *I* might have looked like *that*!" she thought, with a pathetic and bitter

recognition that no penitence, however deep, could bring back to her that blissful ignorance of sin.

She had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the gates of the earthly paradise were closed on her for evermore.

Nelly bent over little Percy, stroked his hair, and kissed the crimson, fever-flushed cheeks; and by-and-by Esther drew near too, and stood at the other side of the cot.

She might have no right to come near such a woman as Nelly; but at least the boy was hers, and she would jealously guard her right to be with him.

Nelly's ready tears were flowing fast as at length she raised her eyes to the cold marble face opposite.

“He is *so* like—oh, so startlingly like our poor Percy!” she said, tremulously. Then, the ice once broken, she went on

more impulsively, "What could you think of me not coming before? I did want to see him, indeed I did——"

She was going to add, "but I did not like to come," but she stopped short.

"How could you come at all?" said Esther, quickly; then, all at once losing her self-control, she covered her face with her hands. "You are too good, too innocent, to come here at all," she wailed, in a voice broken and sad. "Go, now you have seen the child; go and leave me to my shame and my grief! Only don't make it harder for me by showing me what—what I've lost!"

Poor Esther! She had had no one to speak to for months, save old Kitty, Dick, and her father; and the mere presence of a young and pure woman roused in her a wild longing for sympathy and love, which she knew too well to be futile.

“ Oh, don’t talk like that,” said Nelly, passionately. “ I know I deserve it, for I have been hard and self-righteous beyond forgiveness; but oh, I didn’t know you, Esther, and I didn’t know how self-sacrificing you had been to our Percy, nor how he felt to you at the last.”

Then with a sudden impulse—more perhaps one of pity and penitence than of love—Nelly stooped and kissed the white face which hung over the crib.

At this, Esther’s last remnant of self-control gave way. She threw herself on her knees by the child, and broke into a perfect passion of hysterical sobs.

She had scarcely wept since the news came that had almost broken her heart, not even at the danger of her child, nor the illness which followed it; but this kiss, this loving woman kiss, melted the icy barrier which had sealed the fountain of her tears.

Nelly stayed until she grew calm again; crying with her, of course, and soothing her as best she could. The brief hour there did the work of years; for, in spite of all that had happened, they were friends now, these two—friends for evermore.

Nelly said nothing of her visit to Mr. Scott; but she fancied he knew for all that, and that he was not displeased. This feeling emboldened her, and made her go again and again; even when little Percy had got the turn for the better, and was fast getting well again.

Then the old man met her one day close to Esther's cottage. He gave her a queer and yet a kindly look.

“ You've been to see the bairn, Nelly? ” he said, quietly. “ Well, well, I'm not the one to forbid ye, so ye needn't look so feared ! ”

"Lord, I would like well to have  
another peer at him myself!" he added,  
holding his breath, as Nelly passed on,  
utterly surprised at his words.

## CHAPTER XVII.

ADAM GREY showed the bitterness he still felt about Esther's shame, by never mentioning or taking any notice of the little one, who now toddled or crept about all over at his mother's side, and had begun to talk in his sweet baby fashion. But there seemed a fascination, nevertheless, to the old man in the child. Whenever he thought no one was looking, his eyes were fixed upon it with a strange, hard, glassy stare. Esther had never met this look, or she would have dreaded—she knew not what!

It was a look of hate, which fed itself by the eye from day to day, and from hour to hour.

One wet morning Esther was obliged to go into the village for some necessaries, and she did not care to take little Percy out in the rain with her. Her father could now be left for a short time; he could manage to move his hands pretty freely, although he would never walk again, and had to be indebted for help to get from one room to another; this one little change being all he could have.

“Will you look to him while I am away, father, and see that he doesn’t fall into any mischief? He will be quiet directly, if you bid him.”

The old man gave a kind of grunt, which might signify acquiescence; and Esther went her way, leaving the little one playing very happily on the floor with some wooden bricks which Dick had made for him.

Adam Grey looked into the fire while

she spoke to him ; but no sooner had she closed the door, than his eyes reverted to her child.

He did not want to look, for queer, cruel, wicked wishes kept coming into his mind when he did so ; but it was no use, try as he might, the sight drew him again !

A sweet, innocent sight enough—only a little soft, rounded creature, with rings of dark curls, and cheeks like the sunny side of a peach ; but as this cold-natured, respectable man looked at it, he felt almost maddened.

Why had the child not been drowned that day ? why had it lived only to brand its mother with everlasting disgrace ? If it were not for it, they could go away to some other part of the country, where no one knew her story, and begin a new life ! He had been fond of Esther—nay, he *was* fond of her—how could he help

wishing that her shame might be forgotten ?

The little creature had tired of its bricks, and came tottering across the floor towards the fire, laughing and crowing as it watched the blaze.

Was he possessed, or was his brain affected by the stroke which had numbed his body ? It surely could not be his own heart prompted the horrible thought that flashed into his mind ?

Accidents would happen ; children had fallen into the fire, and been burned to death before any assistance could be given, especially in such out-of-the-way places as this ! What did Esther mean by leaving her child in the charge of a poor, paralyzed man who could not rise to assist it ? And of course a child who was frightened would run any way but towards those who could help it.

A sudden start would do it—or per-

haps even if he just let it alone—and then——

But by this time the wee fellow had turned, and stood by the side of the arm-chair, and looked up into his face. Then something there seemed to startle it, for its eyes grew round and big, and its pretty under lip puckered up for a cry. The paralyzed man took hold of its arm to push it from him; he knew he could do this, for he had more power than any one gave him credit for, and he could not bear to see the little innocent face; but the baby clung to his hand and laughed again.

It had never known anything but love and kindness in its short, happy life, and it could not believe that anything else was meant now. Grandpa wanted a game, that was all, and so did Percy for that matter!

So, seizing upon the outstretched arm,

the child managed to crawl upon the old man's knee, and patting the grim cheeks, lisped out, "Me 'ants to play with oo now, that's a dood granpa."

At the first clinging touch of the little creature as it nestled close up to him, all the evil went out of the old man's mind at once. He drew the child to him as well as he could, and shuddered at the thought of what might have been.

Good Heavens ! Was it murder that had been in his heart ? Murder, black, cowardly, and horrible—murder of a defenceless baby ?

After this, a complete revulsion of feeling took place in Adam Grey's breast in favour of little Percy. He watched him now with as deep an interest as ever ; but happily of a very different nature.

And once this interest became kindly, trust such a sweet-natured child as little

Percy to win its way through every obstacle ! Who could resist such pretty, coaxing ways ? And a creature so full of intense vivid life, never still for many moments together, could not fail to be intensely attractive to one in whose veins the blood crept sluggishly, and who had so little power of movement left ?

Esther could not help noticing the change, for now her father would scarcely allow the little fellow out of his sight ; and with still a spark of the old selfishness, jealously watched that even she did not monopolize too much of his baby love and attention. Luckily, the boy took to the invalid ; and would play with him, or close before his chair, for hours contentedly.

So they were busy on a fine spring day, very happy the two together, when they were broken in upon in a way that Mr. Grey did not bargain for.

Little Percy had brought in a lapful of daisies and buttercups, and was playing with them, pelting his grandpapa, throwing them in the air, and letting them fall on his face, then laughing merrily.

All at once there was a knock at the door; and Esther, opening it, gave a cry of amazement, and then stood trembling all over, not speaking a word of greeting.

“ Well, are you not going to ask me in, Esther, lass ? ” said a voice in which nervousness was ill-disguised by an assumption of ease; “ I want to see the youngster—his boy.”

Esther tried to murmur words of welcome, but they died away on her lips; however, she motioned the new comer in, and drew a chair forward.

“ Don’t look like that, girl ! ” cried Mr. Scott, hoarsely. “ Is there anything so out of the way in my claiming a share in

my lad's little one? Don't be hard, lass; for Heaven's sake, don't be too hard, because I've been a proud and self-willed old man. I've been punished enough for it, surely, now that I've lost the one I cared for most on earth! Ye may believe that or not, but it's true, any way."

"I know it is," said Esther, softly; "I always said you loved him!"

"Then let me see his boy sometimes!" asked Percy's father, immediately; "forgive me for being too severe on *him*, and let me have the bairn?"

"I cannot part with him; I can never part with him!" cried the mother, impulsively; casting a frightened look at her baby, and fearing Mr. Scott meant to take him away from her.

Perhaps—who could tell—the old man's heart having relented to the child, he might wish to have it always with him.

No, no, she could bear much, but not

that—not that ! But she had quite mis-understood the farmer's intentions.

“ Tut, tut, how could you think I meant that ? ” said Mr. Scott, crossly; then altering his tone, “ But I don't wonder at ye misjudgin' me, after all that's come and gone ! I only want leave to come and see him, and have him up at the farm sometimes, for ye would hardly believe how lonely I am now, Esther; lonely wanting *him*, I mean, or you would pity me a bit ! Think what I have to repent of.”

The tears came into Esther's eyes at the old man's words. After all, he was Percy's father, and had a right to some share of her boy's love, now he claimed it.

She lifted the little fellow in her arms, and put him up on Mr. Scott's knee.

“ Kiss him, Percy,” she said, kindly.

But the young rebel fixed his large dark eyes on the old man's face, and

shook his head decidedly. He had been taken away from his game with his flowers and his grandpapa, and for once his sweet temper was ruffled.

“Percy not know him,” he whimpered; “Percy not tiss old man, ‘cause Percy don’t know him !”

Mr. Scott looked down at the little creature admiringly.

How like, how cruelly like his poor lost son it was !

“Kiss me, because I’m your grandpapa, then,” he said, coaxingly; but master Percy shook his head more vigorously than ever.

“Dat my dranpa,” he cried, pointing a tiny finger at the silent figure by the fireside, who was listening intently to all that was said, and who now chuckled delightedly at the child’s persistence.

Spite of all Mr. Scott’s coaxing, and spite of his dangling his keys and seals

before the boy's eyes, the little fellow wriggled off his knee, and running across to Mr. Grey's chair, hid his face, and laughed merrily; a laugh echoed less noisily by the old man he leaned against.

"Well, well, better luck next time!" said the farmer, in rather a disappointed tone, as he rose to go, after a word or two with the paralyzed man; "I don't mean to give in, until he comes to me of his own accord. He is a fine little chap, and we may all be proud of him."

"Ay, it's all very well to talk like that now," grumbled Adam Grey from his arm-chair, after Farmer Scott had gone; "but if he thinks he's going to have all his own way with my daughter's bairn, he'll find himself mistaken! Percy, you young monkey, come and play with me again."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

It was a cosy, comfortable room, that which Alick Lisle occupied on this winter evening; and which served him alike for study and general sitting-room.

Though he had most certainly not gone in for aesthetics, there was a pleasing harmony of colour and design in the furnishings; and the walls were relieved by well-lined book-shelves, and a few well-chosen pictures, landscapes of woodland scenery principally.

A writing-table stood near Alick's chair, and on it lay a formidable pile of closely written foolscap, the work of months of thought and care. It was his new book, indeed, carefully revised and,

copied, lying all ready to be sent to the publishers.

He knew the work was more powerful, more passionate, more mature, than anything he had done yet ; and that, with it once published, he would in all probability stand in the front rank of writers, shoulder by shoulder with the foremost thinkers of the nation—those thinkers that one half of the reading world quotes as incontrovertible authorities, while the other half mentions them with bated breath and pious horror. Nevertheless, as Alick sat there glancing towards it now and then, his face was thoughtful, even sad.

He took up a book, only to lay it down impatiently, then rose and paced the floor. He could not sit still.

After a while he drew a sheet of note-paper towards him and began to write. Apparently, however, the author of that bulky book was not equal to the task of

writing a letter, for after labouring through a few lines he threw the pen down in disgust, and resumed his first attitude. He gazed into the fire dreamily, questioningly.

What wonder ?

He had just come in from his adventure with Dick Hepple, and he could not get the scene out of his head. How completely powerless he had been to stem the tide of the man's passionate words !

Then naturally his mind had reverted to Nelly—Nelly, whose deep, pure affection for her brother he knew so well. He could fancy her almost crushed by grief for this loss.

How he longed to fold her in his arms and comfort her, as he had done in her grief little more than a year ago !

Surely he might at least write her a word of sympathy, if he must no longer speak to her of love ?

But when he essayed to do this—  
behold, it was a miserable failure !

The cold, paralyzing spell of unbelief  
was on him, and he was dumb.

Once before that night he had found no  
power within him to help a man in his  
hour of sinful need ; now he was equally  
helpless to comfort a woman in her hour  
of sorrow—perhaps even of despair. And  
the woman, too, of all others whom he  
loved so dearly !

Was there not something wrong in a  
creed that had such influence as this ?

Truth should be health-giving, and  
falsehood enervating, unless, indeed, the  
whole fabric of the universe, and man's  
soul itself, had been called into being by  
the Father of lies—if there were such a  
person in existence ?

Such a gigantic swindle as life would  
otherwise be, it seemed scarcely possible  
to believe could have been self-created.

And yet — there was Cameron, who apparently held on to one or two fragments of the old creeds—the belief in a God who made man, and who took an interest in him — had shown that this belief, truly held, was powerful enough to save a man from himself, or from the devil—which was, perhaps, after all, only another way of putting things.

Oh, if he, Alick, could only have believed as much as that even, it would have been easy enough to write a word of comfort to the sorrow-stricken girl, of whom his thoughts were full !

Could he not have told her, then, that it was no mere chance, no blind sequence of events, that had led her brother on, through and out of his selfish folly, to the sublime heroism of his death ?

When he had read Captain Brown's account of his own narrow escape, and the splendid self-surrender of Private

Scott, it seemed incredible that this hero, who had knowingly sacrificed his own life to save that of a wounded man—almost a stranger to him—could be the same lad whose nerves had given way so despicably through fear of a rabid dog.

Could it be possible that his soul had been trained by experience, and elevated by suffering, until it reached so high an altitude—only to go out into the darkness—the last brilliant flicker of a candle before it is snuffed out into nothingness?

Was it not, after all, more credible that there is a power of aspiration in the soul which lends it strength even to meet death unshrinkingly; a prophetic instinct which tells it that death is not annihilation, but the appointed way to a higher, fuller life? Surely, all creatures by nature sought their best development—was man alone in this rising to self-sacrifice only as a quicker means of destruction?

He longed to be convinced by his own arguments ; and yet involuntarily there flitted across his mind, clearly as though spoken in his ear, “ Yet the moth seeks the flame—does it live again, think you ? ”

Who knows ? Who can prove that it does not ? Still the thought shut him up on that side.

Wearily, wearily his brain moved on—climbing the terrible treadmill of thought—which achieved no result, let him labour as he would.

By-and-by his thought left the region of metaphysics, and centred themselves round that figure which had ever for him a strange attraction—the figure of Christ Jesus.

If one could do no better than die for truth, or what one believed to be truth, was not the death of this one man sublime ?

The atheist might see in that figure no

self-sacrificing God, no Saviour of man, no sacrificial offering; but the honest heart of the man recognized in it the ring of honesty, and the truthful apostle of No God could not but honour the enthusiast who had declared a loving one.

Alick had taken the first step back to faith long ago, when he felt an intense human pity for the *man* Jesus, who, after a life spent in loving and serving a God whom he called "Father," died declaring himself forsaken. Alick's sceptical intellect had taken hold of this, and it was almost with a sneer that he felt the necessity for such desolation.

The dream of God might well depart in the reality of death, he thought. And yet his heart never ceased to give battle to his intellect on this point.

The creed was so beautiful; the teacher of that creed so noble—oh, God, if it were only true?

Alick had taken no food for hours, and his brain was growing hot and feverish, and every now and then his thoughts whirled round illogically. But strange as it may seem, these are often the hours when the deepest insight comes to thinkers.

The last sentence he had unconsciously uttered aloud, and the sound of his own voice seemed strange to him, and he wondered at the name he had unconsciously invoked. How long was it since he had uttered that name in prayer?

Years ago, when he had saved Percy Scott from the mad dog and gave himself up for lost. He had used it then, he remembered. Did the old belief cling to him still, that his very voice took part against him and cried out in the prayerful language inherited from generations? Or could it be that in those moments of emotion the spirit freed itself from the

power of the will, and rose spontaneously to God? Rose to its source whenever the barrier was removed.

Yes, Christ's figure stood out sublime in its majesty of sorrow; sublime in its love to man.

It was the one embodiment of self-sacrifice, which for all time stood unequalled.

There came back to this truth-seeker of the nineteenth century an echo of the great teacher's greatest truth, "If any man lose his life, he shall save it."

Alick bowed his head on his hands. If that were true, after all?

If he could only believe it, what a message of comfort and strength he might send to his dear one!

The hours rolled on, and still Alick sat there thinking, and his thoughts still clung to the one idea.

He had long recognized the beauty of

the gospel; was it possible that now—after all his years of unbelief, his months of writing against its truth—there was coming to him a realization of the poet's fancy—

“We shall recognize as Truth at last,  
What here as Beauty only we have viewed”?

He felt as though it might indeed be so, for he had found at last a side where the many-sided truth had power to draw him.

To this man's brain the old doctrines of the Trinity had ever seemed a mere jingle of words; the incarnation a beautiful myth; the atonement—unthinkable. But once really grasping self-abnegation as the law of spiritual life, he no longer felt that Christ Himself must be a fable. Might not the highest law for man be also the highest law for God? Oh for strength to believe that it was so!

Then, life's hardest tasks were easy; and the sacrifice of joy and comfort; the

choice of personal loss for other's gain, was no longer the lonely thing he had believed it to be, for in doing it man became one with the Infinite. Did Alick believe at last, or did he not?

One thing was certain. Never more would he try to lead one soul away from this source of strength! Never more would he be the one to withdraw from the weak and the helpless the power for good which lay in such belief. Had he not himself proved the utter failure and misery of unbelief in human passion and in human woe?

Slowly he rose; and taking them, one after another, from the table, he threw the pages of his new work into the fire, and held them there until they were all consumed.

Months of toilsome thought, months of patient work, all gone in less than a quarter of an hour!

But, though the face which bent over the funeral pyre might be pale, and the lips tremulous; it was nevertheless a happier one; or, at least, there was in it the promise of a happiness greater than it had ever known.

He had parted with his right hand, and he did not know even then whether he had entered into the kingdom.

## CHAPTER XIX.

ALICK's sacrifice was not succeeded by the joy which we are so often taught invariably follows such self-conquest as his.

Instead of this, he seemed to wander in a mist of doubt and uncertainty.

Did he believe, or did he not?

This was the question of all others Alick longed to have answered.

There were times when all his unbelief seemed like an evil dream out of which he had awakened now; but at others his newly-found faith seemed a mad phantasy, or, worse still, a freak of involuntary self-deception.

For one thing, the question had got so hopelessly interwoven with his love to Nelly and his right to return to her, that he could not but distrust himself.

Had he not lied once before to win her love? Well, God helping him, he would not do it again!

He had not written to her even yet; he felt, indeed, too miserably self-conscious to write as his heart dictated; to whisper the words of faith and hope that came into his mind. He felt as though it would be like taking advantage of her grief. Above all, he feared for himself—feared that by the slightest dishonesty he might blight the germs of faith within his soul.

No, he would let a few weeks pass at least, until Nelly should have recovered in some measure from the shock of her brother's death, and be completely mistress of herself. Then he would go to

her, tell of his struggles, his longing to believe—would as far as possible show his whole soul to her, and let her be arbitress of his destiny. The old reserve had proved a failure. He would trust her now. Trust her woman's loving heart to give her sympathy with him, even where her brain failed to grasp the full force of the problems that had driven him to despair. If she could not, dared not trust him in return, at least he would be free from the continual temptation to dishonesty which beset him now; and he would be better able to understand himself.

Nelly's thoughts had often flown to Alick during the terrible weeks of suspense, followed by the agonizing certainty of Percy's death.

How she had longed for the strong arm and tender heart of her lover!

And yet she blamed herself as heartless

for thinking of him now; for fancying that if he were only beside her, she could bear her loss better.

“Oh, Alick, Alick,” she moaned sometimes in her loneliness, as she leaned from the window of her room, and saw the desolate wintry scene around, and felt the nipping winds of early spring blow on her hot temples, “why did you leave me, darling? My brother is dead, my only brother; and there is no one to comfort me—no one who cares!”

Resigned?

How could she be resigned? Her handsome boy dead, and her lover separated from her *for ever*—at least, according to the creed she had been taught.

God had dealt hardly—cruelly with her and those she loved!

Her heart rose at times in wild rebellion, for love was an element in the girl’s nature, and would not be suppressed.

Then she would throw herself on her knees, and sobbingly pray to be forgiven.

And yet doubt would creep in even while she prayed there. Had she not prayed for Percy's safety, and God hadn't heard, or hadn't cared? Had she not prayed, too, that Alick, her Alick, might be brought to faith—and to her; and the months rolled on, and he never came or wrote.

Most likely he had forgotten her, she tortured herself with thinking. Perhaps, in the great world where he was, he had met some clever woman, who understood him better than she had done, and who didn't mind his strange ideas? How could it be expected he would keep faithful to one who could neither comprehend nor sympathize with his great mind?

But, oh, how wicked she was to think God was ever cruel! And how utterly base to think of her own desolation and

parting from her lover, when all she *should* care for was that he should be saved from his unbelief!

What wonder that, when Alick suddenly entered the parlour where she sat in her dreary solitude, she should spring to him with a great cry of joy; and that he should fold her to his heart, and kiss again and again the tearful eyes, and drawn forehead, and pale cheeks; all the dearer to him for their sad, pathetic look of weariness and pain?

“Oh, my Nelly, I didn’t mean to do this,” he said at last; “I don’t know that I have the right to hold you so, my love, my love!” and he gently released her, and drew her to a seat on the couch.

Then, as best he could, he told her all.

The depth of his scepticism, the wild outcry against God, followed by his bitter denial of God’s very existence.

The book he had written while thinking

thus, and some of the thoughts which were in it. Of Dick Hepple and Cameron he told her, and how he felt his failure either to help or sympathize. Of his feelings, too, on the night when he had tried to write to her.

One thing only he kept back then, and this was the sacrifice of his idol to his dawning faith !

When his story was nearly ended, he turned his head away from Nelly.

He could not bear to watch her face, and the growing resolution which he feared to see on it.

Never, never had he loved her as he did at this moment, when he finished his story in a broken voice.

“Tell me to go, darling, if you think you ought,” he said, in a hoarse whisper ; “I will try never to trouble you again, if that is your decision ! ”

A moment’s silence, broken by nothing

but the tick of the old upright eight-day clock in the corner. It seemed an eternity of anguish to Alick as he waited for his doom.

Then Nelly's soft fingers closed on his.

“Oh, Alick, Alick, don't leave me again!” said a sweet, loving voice; “I know too well now that faith is not always easy! Darling Alick, stay with me, and we will try to help each other.”

## CHAPTER XX.

ONCE again was that sunny head pillow'd on Alick's breast, and Nelly sobbed out her passionate grief there near the true heart of the man she loved; and recognized that God had heard her prayers, after all.

Mr. Scott came in after a while, and shook hands gravely with Alick, and glanced wonderingly at his daughter's happy face.

“He'd never been able to get at the rights of the quarrel,” he thought to himself; “but he dared say it was nothing very much. A breeze now and then keeps the air sweet, he'd heard say.

---

Well, well, whatever it had been, they'd evidently made it up again, and for his part he was not sorry ! For the lass was a good one, and had never given him an hour's uneasiness since she was born, and had had her share of troubles, too. Ay, and Alick Lisle was a manly, straightforward chap, whatever the parson might say ; and all this new-fangled nonsense would pass away when he got a bit older, and had a wife and bairns of his own—ay, and property of his own—it always turned out so anyway ! ”

So Alick was once again received on his old footing at the farm.

But there was a tender sweetness and completeness in their love now that had been lacking before, and they both knew it.

There was only one thing left that troubled Nelly's soul as she once more said good night in the old porch, and watched the quiet stars shine out.

“What will you do with that—that book, Alick, dear?” she whispered, softly. “You wouldn’t wish to disturb other people’s faith now, and make them doubt of God and heaven?”

And as the girl ended, she looked at him earnestly, though a little timidly.

Then he told her at last how it could never trouble any one’s faith now, and stooped and kissed the sweet lips before they could utter the words of gladness and sympathy that trembled on them. And Nelly turned back into the house with a strangely restful feeling of peace and thankfulness.

Mrs. Lisle, on her part, did not know whether to be glad or sorry when she heard of the approaching wedding.

What had broken it off at first? Before she gave an opinion on the subject at all, she would just like to have that question answered?

Because if it had been that the family didn't think her Alick good enough—why, her idea was that such a clever young man, and one that was making no end of money, too—mind you that—needn't have gone down on his knees to be received into any household thereabouts! That's what she would have said, had she been consulted!

And such a mother as she had been to them all might surely have had some say in her eldest's son's marriage. Not that she had much against the girl; there'd never been anything bad said of her—but the connection—some folks would turn up their noses at such a connection!

But there, she supposed Alick knew best, although he might have told his mother more about his love affairs, she could not help saying that. All the others came to her in their troubles;

but Alick was never like the rest. All the same, she was very proud of him, and nothing pleased her more than to have him with her again, and listen to his voice. He talked more than he used to do ; seemed less reserved, less moody ; happier than of old. This must be Nelly Scott's doing ; and, if so, if wasn't for his mother to object !

Then when Nelly came to see the old woman, and sat and listened attentively while Alick was talked over, and all the little details of his childhood, boyhood, and youth dwelt on with fond and ill-concealed maternal pride ; Mrs. Lisle quite softened to her.

“ She is a bonny lass and a good, let who say what will,” was the comment after her departure. “ And not a bit o' stuck-up nonsense about her either, as I can see ! I really don't know but Alick might ha' done worse, after all, especially

now there's no one else for the money—goodness forbid he heard me, though! He takes after his father, does that lad o' mine, and always did—though it's not for his mother to speak ill o' him behind his back, especially me that thinks such a lot of him."

There was still a visit which Nelly wished to make, and yet felt half shy of.

"Don't you think Esther will be hurt, if—— Don't you think we ought to go and see her together, I mean?" she said one day, when Alick wished her to go out with him.

"Have you told her?" he asked, leaving it to be understood what he meant.

"I never need to tell Esther things," was the reply. "She seems always to understand without that!"

Then they started off together to the little cottage on the hill-side.

Spring was now advancing, and the air was warm and sweet. Just such a morning as that on which they had taken their last walk together.

Spite of all that had come and gone since then ; spite even of Nelly's black dress, and the loss it betokened, this was still a happier walk to the girl, and it certainly was so to Alick.

Before they came to the cottage, a pretty little picture met their eyes.

Dick Hepple, in his shirt-sleeves, smoking his pipe, and leaning against an old wall contentedly ; while little Percy sprawled on his velveteen coat, with his fat arms round old Nettle's neck. They looked a perfectly happy trio those—the man, the child, and the dog.

Master Percy had taken a very great fancy for the big, strong fellow who could carry him about untiringly ; and Dick was a willing slave.

---

Since the day he had rescued the child from drowning, a deep and tender love had grown up in his heart for it; and he had now no greater pleasure than being entrusted with the boy, and catering for his amusement.

Esther, on her part, knew instinctively that the little fellow was as safe with the rough but soft-hearted man as he was in her own keeping.

Dick looked nervous and sheepish when he set eyes on Alick. What if the latter should tell Esther of the wicked and murderous thoughts which had filled his mind only a few weeks ago?

No, no; Alick wouldn't split on a chap; one glance at the kindly face told Dick that!

As long as he behaved himself—which he certainly meant to do now, for the sake of Esther, and the sake of the young one—his secret was safe enough with Alick Lisle!

A friendly shake of the hand ; a caress to the boy ; a warm response to Nettle's frantic recognition ; and Alick passed on, followed by his sweetheart.

Alick scarcely needed Nelly's assurances of Dick's good behaviour.

"Poor fellow ; he is so good and so steady now," she said, kindly. "And really he does a lot of work, if he is just allowed to do it in his own fashion, and when he is disposed ! Father never interferes with him, because, you see, he saved our little Percy ; and there's plenty for him to do, because the farm is overrun with rabbits, and we want them thinned out. And, dear me, if poor old Nettle does poach a bit now and then, she cannot do much harm, so lame as she is ; and what matter if a hare now and then, etc., etc. ?"

So Dick Hepple was provided for at

last, as long as he chose to be on his good behaviour. Dick was in high favour; and Mr. Scott could be liberal enough when he chose.

## CHAPTER XXI.

As the knock came to the door, Esther hastily hid something in her bosom before opening it.

It was the cigar-case that Dick had found long ago, and intended to use as a help to his revenge; now he had ventured to give it to Esther as a memento of her lover, telling her only that he had picked it up many months ago. Esther looked at the little relic tenderly; and yet she seldom dwelt on the memory of Percy, for a strange new feeling of hope had taken its place in her mind.

“His wife in the sight of God,” he had



said. If that were true, might she not look forward to meeting him again—meeting and being one with him in the world to which he had gone?

The thought served to comfort her, made it possible to go on living in the present, and was bringing a look of peace upon her face. A look that struck Alick at once in contrast to the strained intensity of the expression she had worn when he had last seen her.

Nelly was very, very happy ; but now that she had come and brought her lover with her—claiming, as it were, this poor chastened woman's sympathy in her joy—she felt all at once that she had done a cruel thing.

After the first few sentences were spoken, and the talk had drifted back insensibly to Percy's death, Nelly slipped from her seat and buried her face on Esther's knee ; with some sweet, tender,

womanly words of pity for the lonely woman out of whose life, as it seemed to her, love had for ever faded. Esther laid her hand on Nelly's bent head and stroked her hair caressingly.

“ Surely you don't think I grudge you your happiness, dear ? ” she said, softly. “ Nor is love lost to me as you say ; it is only waiting—waiting where it is indeed infinitely safer than it would have been here with me ! ”

There was such a quiet conviction, such a suppressed fervour in her tone, that her listeners looked up surprised.

It was no cruel playing with her faith, but only a pathetic longing to hear his own better thoughts confirmed, that made Alick ask solemnly—

“ You don't believe death ends all, then ? ”

“ I know it does not,” returned Esther, quietly ; “ I don't only *hope*, I know ! ”

Listen to me you two, and I will tell you why I say so."

"The night Percy died I had a dream sent to me—a dream which I either could not understand at the time, or interpreted wrongly.

"I thought I was sitting by the edge of a stream, looking sadly into its dark waters; and thinking miserably, rebelliously, wickedly of my separation from the one I loved. I was not weeping though, for my grief seemed all too great for tears. Suddenly in a still pool below, I saw the reflection of my darling's face, bending over. With a great cry of joy I turned quickly round. Yes, there he was, standing on the bank above, looking, oh, so glorious, so radiant with happiness and love! My heart first leapt, then died within me. Could this be my Percy after all, this being without trace of toil or wound or care upon him?

“ I would have thrown myself into his arms, but that some strange feeling of shyness and distance came over me. How was it ? There he stood looking lovingly down upon me, and yet I absolutely dared not approach him nearer !

“ His eyes as he looked at me were like stars—so clear and bright did they appear—and yet they made me tremble somehow. When he noticed my trouble he smiled. It was his old smile, only infinitely sweeter, infinitely more joyful.

“ ‘ Do you fear for me, my Esther ? ’ he said, gently. ‘ Nay, my dear one, fear no longer ! See how well and strong and happy I am ! ’

“ ‘ Were you happy away from me ? ’ I cried at this, tears of bitter jealousy starting at the words.

“ ‘ No, I was anything but happy ; but what of that now ? Promise me you will not grieve too deeply, Esther, now you

know where I am and how I am at peace. Even in happiness my dear one's tears would hurt me—remember that when you feel sad and sorry, darling !'

"' But why should I be sad and sorry now you are come back to me, Percy ? ' I asked, wonderingly ; ' nothing will ever grieve me now.'

" Again Percy smiled—that same sweet, bewildering smile—but made no answer.

" Once more I attempted to approach nearer to him, but once more the same shy, distant sort of feeling crept over me, and kept me away.

"' Percy, Percy, you are changed ! ' I cried, in agony. ' You will not let me come to you ! '

"' Not yet, my Esther, not yet,' he said, softly, waving me back. ' Nay, do not fret, for it will not be long before we are together, never to be parted more ! And see, for a love-token and to prove

that I am speaking truth, I have brought you a flower from that fair land, a flower which I plucked for you myself ! '

" He held out the flower as he spoke ; I reached and took it from his hand.

" I took it carelessly ; but when I looked at it, my heart swelled with wonder and delight. The like of it I had never seen before. Its pure white petals, set in form like a star, seemed to radiate light and glory ; and the air all around was filled with the overpowering fragrance of it. It must indeed be a flower from the far country, the country Percy had just come from ! And yet—what tropical flower was ever so pure, so ethereal in its beauty ? I could not choose but gaze on it with rapture, in which fascination strongly mingled. But when at last I managed to withdraw my eyes, and turned to thank Percy for the precious gift, and see if he shared my delight—behold, he was

no longer there. Ah, what was a flower to me, if I had lost again my love ?

“ Bank, trees, and water had all alike vanished, and I stood there alone, peering into a dense black vacuum, which made my eyes ache in their intense longing to pierce it. Then I threw the flower from me in rage and sorrow, and seemed to fall into the darkness around me—and falling, awoke.”

Esther had been carried out of herself as she told the dream that had made so strong an impression upon her ; and long ere she had finished, Nelly was weeping quietly. Alick, on his part, had turned away, perhaps—who knows ? to hide his face ; and was looking out at the window.

There was silence for a few minutes when Esther finished ; and, indeed, when Alick attempted to speak, his voice failed utterly.

What need indeed of words ? Why try

**weakly to comfort one whom God had surely already comforted ?**

**Even had it not been so, Nelly's loving sisterly kiss was of greater value than any words.**

**And Alick—though he held Nelly's purity above all things, so that he would have maddened at the thought of anything that was unholy or impure coming near to her—winced not to see his darling enfolded in the arms of this woman the world called “ fallen.”**

**His old doctrine might have no power to raise a soul bowed by its own sinfulness ; no gospel of help for one who had lost the innocence of womanhood ; but he felt rather than knew that the creed Esther clung to had helped her in her hour of need. Had helped her through her suffering and her shame, and enabled her to rise ennobled from it, instead of being crushed and degraded.**

---

“ It is good to die if there be gods ; it is sad to live if there be none.”

This thought of an old heathen came involuntarily into Alick’s mind, as he and Nelly turned away.

But as she slipped her little hand through his arm, and looked trustingly, lovingly up into his face—life certainly did not seem a sad thing to *him* at least.

Yet surely it was not only love that brightened life, for had not love failed to do it in the past ?

Ah, what if it should be the faith which was dawning in his heart at last—faintly as yet, it is true—but none the less certainly ?

THE END.













